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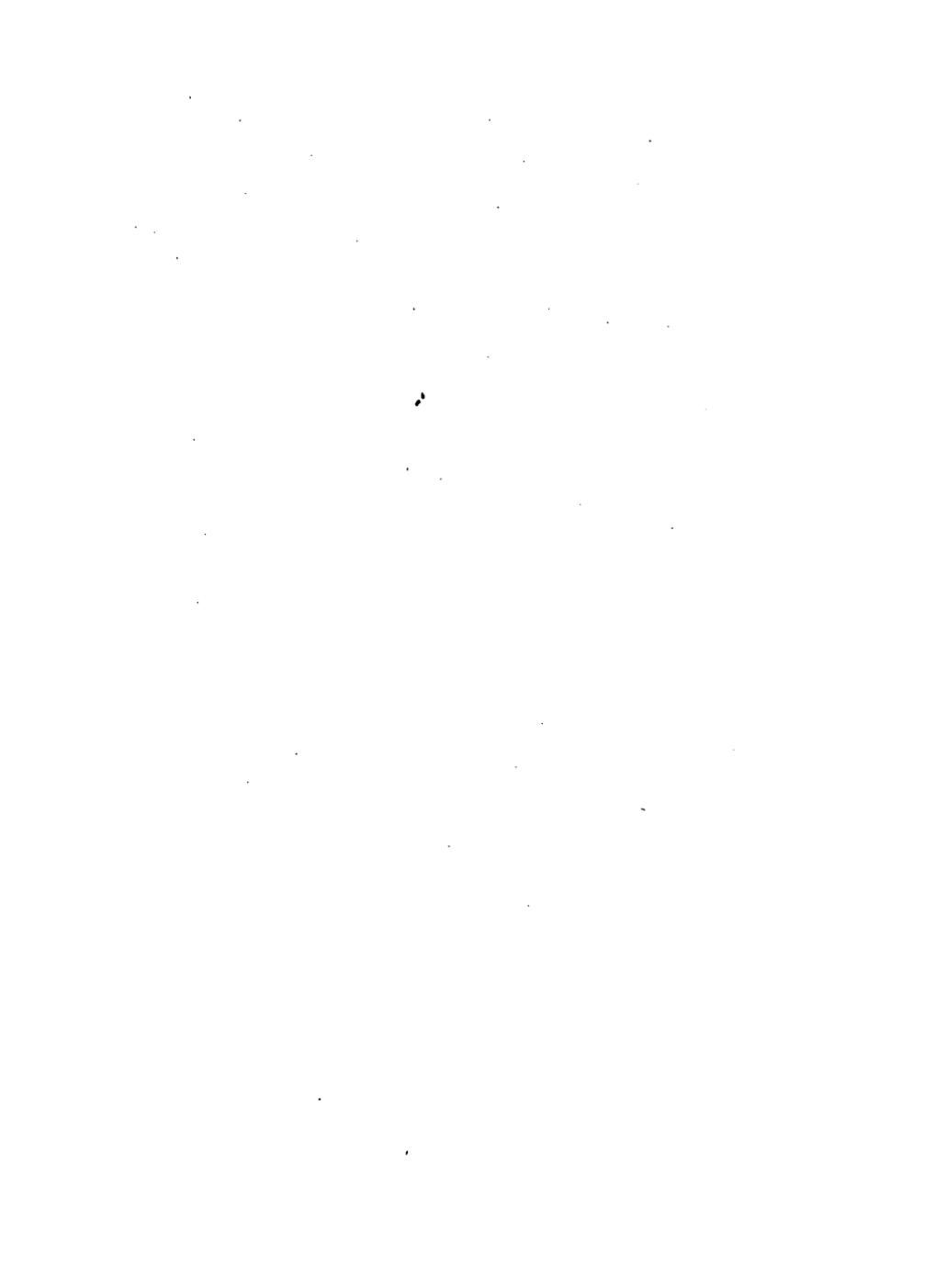
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ECHOES  
FROM A  
VILLAGE CHURCH

REV. FREDRICK HARPER

*With a Preface by*  
GENERAL SIR ARTHUR COTTON



# ECHOES

FROM A

## VILLAGE CHURCH

BY THE

REV. FREDERICK HARPER, M.A.

*VICAR OF SHALFLEET*

WITH PREFACE BY

LIEUT.-GEN. SIR ARTHUR COTTON, R.E., K.C.S.I.



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## P R E F A C E.

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IN this day of rebuke, when so many, who are in the place of teachers, have need to learn again what are the first principles of the oracles of God and desire to be brought again to the weak and beggarly elements under which they may be in bondage, it is a great satisfaction to be reminded by such Sermons as these, that there are yet those, not a few, but many of her Ministers, and moreover *that* an increasing number, who know and teach the way of God in truth, and heartily abide by their oath to be faithful to the Articles of the Church of England. We indeed require to be reminded that the few evil men of whom the newspapers are full, are not all who compose the Clergy of the Church of England, but that by God's grace, there never were so many faithful men in her ministry, whose names are never hardly mentioned beyond their own parishes; who preach in such simplicity, clearness and fulness as these Sermons exhibit, the truth of God, men in whose churches the Pulpit and Reading Desk are in perfect accordance.

Who can estimate what God did for England when He

laid this deep and solid foundation of truth in our Liturgy, containing so wonderful a declaration of all the great and essential truths of Scripture, without adding to or taking from the Word of God? With this inestimable foundation, solidly laid in every Parish of the land, which all the wood, hay and stubble, that is in so many places built upon it cannot remove, the truth holds its own, nay continually extends.

And, as with the ordained Ministry of the Church of England, so also was there anything approaching to the number of faithful men and women unordained, who hold forth the Word of Life from every rank of the body politic, whom it has pleased God in His extraordinary mercy to our land, to raise up for the furtherance of the truth, though they mnst never be called "Reverend." And in this day of wonderful awakening and thirsting for the truth, what multitudes are there in many Parishes, who cannot be satisfied with the chaff which is so often offered to them, to whom such Sermons as these are an absolute necessity, even in this country. In India, where the earnest inquirer is driven out of almost all the churches, such a book as this will be invaluable.

May God in His mercy abundantly bless and prosper it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Arthur Cotton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'A' at the beginning.

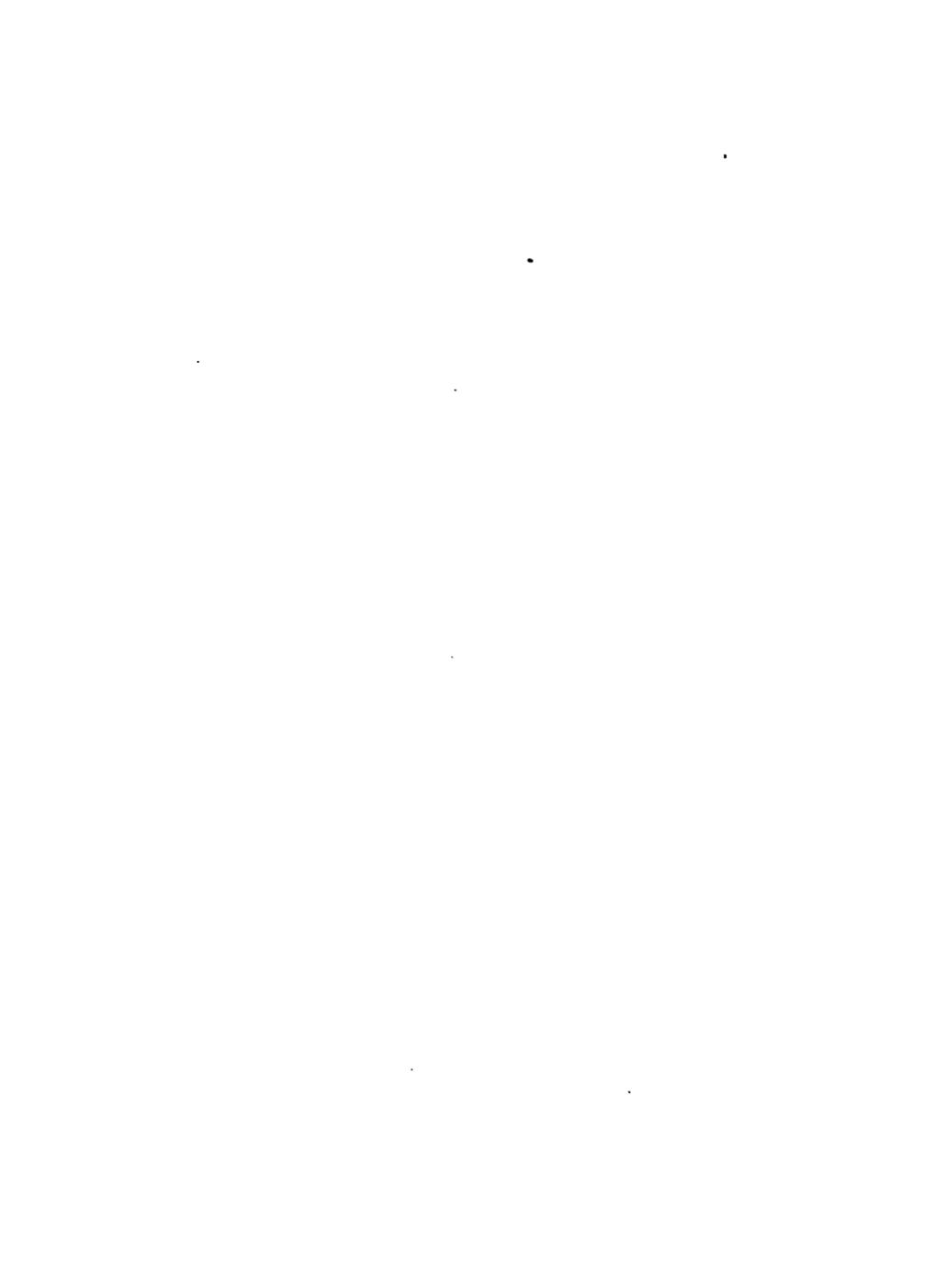
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#### PRAYER BEFORE SERMON.

**A**LMIGHTY God, open our eyes by Thy Holy Spirit  
that we may behold wondrous things out of Thy  
Law, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

I.

## AN ILLUMINATED TEXT.

ST. MATTHEW xi. 28.

Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

IN olden times, before printing was invented, the copyists laboured long and carefully at their manuscripts. Some texts, those I suppose they thought most important, were written in silver or gold or red or blue, and thus marked out from the rest. We have not Bibles now printed in divers colours, yet I am sure if our hearts have been illuminated by the Holy Spirit the Sacred Book is all aglow with texts that have cheered or helped us. No verse I think is more worthy of being printed in gold or vermillion than this.

"Come unto Me," said the Saviour, and perhaps as He spoke He pointed to His Own blessed Self, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I shall never forget what my Vicar said to me before I was ordained—The great point in all preaching should be *to exalt the Saviour and humble the sinner*. May God's Holy Spirit enable me to do so now!

These words of Christ, no matter how often they are read, always have a charm about them. They are never

old. They are always fresh. There are no words like them. Bring out all the plays of Shakspeare, and all the books of Thomas Carlyle, and Milton too, but in them you will find no words like these to heal the soul of sinful man. And I do like to think that He who first uttered them has not changed. Though He has gone to God's Right Hand, and has been exalted and extolled and made very high, He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and still welcomes all who flee to Him for rest.

But who are meant by the weary and heavy-laden? Many people have family trials, an ill-tempered husband or wife, or disobedient, wayward children. These are weary and heavy-laden. Does the Saviour refer to them? I do not think so. Or there are others who have business trials; in these hard times they find it difficult to make both ends meet. They, too, are weary and heavy-laden. Did the Saviour mean these? I hardly think so. Or, again, the artisan and field-labourer toil in the sweat of their brow, and the man of books or figures works hard and long. These are weary too. Did the Saviour refer to them? I do not think He did.

There is a burden heavier than all the vexations of this life, an anguish fiercer than aching head or aching muscle—the intolerable burden and unutterable anguish of sin, when charged home upon the conscience by the Holy Spirit. Did you ever read the “Pilgrim’s Progress?” If not, I advise you to do so at once. I know no human book so well able to tell you the way home to God. First of all, Buuyan pictures his pilgrim with a great burden (of sin) upon his back: he weeps and

trembles, and breaks out with a lamentable cry, saying; What shall I do? And Bunyan was right. I do not say all who are saved feel *equally* the weight of their sin. For example, Cæsar Malan, speaking of his conversion, says, "My heavenly Father awakened me with a kiss." And Lydia's heart too, in Acts xvii., was gently opened by the Holy Spirit to receive the Saviour, and her conversion was thus a distinct contrast to that of the Philippian Jailor. But still, before the soul really flees to Jesus for refuge, it must have *some deep sense of its own sinfulness and guilt.* Therefore I take the words "weary and heavy-laden" to refer to those who feel the evil of sin, and who long to be free from it. And, indeed, the verse following our text seems to point to this meaning—"Ye shall find rest unto your souls."

Let me translate the words for you in order to try to get the exact meaning: Come unto Me, all ye that toil and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Do not some of you feel just like that? You are trying to make your peace with God, you are trying to turn over a new leaf, you make good resolutions, you never go to bed or get up without saying your prayers, still you have no rest, you are not happy, you are not saved, you are burdened with the intolerable burden of your sin.

To you is this invitation sent. Now is the day of salvation, and this moment the Saviour cries, "Come unto Me, and I will refresh you." I know that no man by nature has any power of himself to come to Christ. I am sure that no man will come except he is drawn by the Holy Spirit. And I am equally sure that we are by

nature unwilling to come. Our Lord's own words set this question for ever at rest in my own mind—He says, “Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life.” Do you then feel your own helplessness and unwillingness to come to the Saviour? Then pray to the Holy Spirit to draw you. He will do so, if you ask him.

And what will Jesus give to all who come to Him? Our text answers in one sweet word—Rest.

1. Rest in life. Rest, now. And how will He give us “rest?” By completely pardoning all our sins. Oh, who can tell the wretchedness, the loneliness, the bitterness, the misery of sin? What pen can paint the shame and remorse ever dogging the footsteps of the sinner? I will arise and go to my Saviour, says the awakened soul, and He forgives all, fully, completely, and for ever. He is just as able as He was eighteen centuries ago to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee. He blots out the guilt, He remembers the sin no more, He removes it as far as the east is from the west. This is how He gives rest.

But more, how refreshing to the penitent sinner is the Saviour's sympathy. You may say, No one understands me, and no one enters into my feelings. But Christ can. He can sympathise. God forbid we should undervalue human sympathy. It is a sweet thing to enjoy, and we need it. Let him who doubts this read the lines Cowper wrote “On receipt of his Mother's Picture”—

Oh that those lips had language! Life has pass'd  
With me but roughly since I heard thee last.

But however sweet human sympathy may be, there are

some trials and heartaches into which it cannot enter. And then, oh ! how warm the grasp of a Saviour's hand, and how sweet the voice of His love while the heart sighs—

Take my poor fluttering soul to rest,  
And lodge it safely in Thy breast !

And again, Christ gives righteousness. I am a guilty sinner, and how shall I meet a holy God ? O my soul, clothed in the righteousness of thy Saviour, thou mayest boldly appear before the Eternal. Put on the garments of thy Elder Brother, and thou needest not be afraid. Thy sins were imputed to Him, His spotless righteousness is imputed to thee. This is how Christ gives rest.

ii. Rest in death. Yes, a sweet, calm, peaceful "rest" even when flesh and heart are failing. We have a beautiful instance of this in the case of the late sweet singer—F. R. Havergal. The day before she died, she said to the doctor, "Do you really think I am going?" He said, "Yes." "To-day?" "Probably." Was she afraid or sorry? Not so. She said, "*Beautiful! too good to be true!*" A little while after, her clergyman came to see her, and she remarked, "I am going to see Him—the King in His beauty—yet, my King." He then asked, "Dear Sister, is Jesus with you now?" Her face lighted up, as she replied, "*Of course He is!*" And just before she went home she sang the first verse of that beautiful hymn—

Jesus, I will trust Thee, trust Thee with my soul ;  
Guilty, lost, and helpless, Thou canst make me whole.  
There is none in heaven or on earth like Thee :  
Thou hast died for sinners—therefore, Lord, for me.

Does not the dear Saviour make good His precious promise of giving "rest," even when His children walk adown the valley of the shadow of death?

III. He will give rest in Heaven. "There remaineth yet a rest to the people of God." The last enemy will then have been destroyed; temptation, pain, conflict over for ever; the eye satisfied with seeing, the ear satisfied with hearing—such is the rest in Heaven which belongs to all who come to Christ on earth. Here below discord is soon made, the devil delights to vex the people of the Lord, and they are often discouraged because of the way—but nothing yonder will ever be permitted to mar the endless Sabbath of the skies. This is how Christ gives rest.

Now, there may be one here who says, I do want to come to Jesus, but if I did come, I fear I should fall back again into the world, some terrible temptation will suddenly present itself and I shall yield to it, and my last state will be worse than my present, because I shall have made a profession of being a Christian. Now, if you give up yourself to Jesus, can you not trust Him to keep you? You will not have to keep yourself. Is not He *able* to preserve you from the world, and from the devil, and most of all—from *yourself*? And has He not *promised* to do this? Every one who by God's grace flees to Jesus as his Saviour, and gives up himself to Him has a right to use the triumphant words of St. Paul, and say, "*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day*" (2 Tim. i. 12).

Oh, young man, you who are living for yourself, would that I could persuade you of the wretchedness and misery that ever accompanies a life of sin and forgetfulness of God. Your hair is brown, but very soon it will be grey. It is your morning now, but the afternoon will soon be here, and then the evening-bell will call you home. Oh ! may God's Holy Spirit draw you to Christ this day !

And you, my sister, who are following the follies of this poor passing world, have you no desire to spend your *one life* for God ? Do you not wish to spend it as Aquila and Priscilla spent theirs, and as Phœbe spent hers ? Jesus can give you grace so to live. Oh ! may God's Holy Spirit draw you to Christ this day !

And you, too, who are middle-aged. Grey hairs are here and there upon you and yet you know it not ! The shadows of death and eternity are falling around you. Oh, may the Holy Spirit draw you to Christ this day !

And some of you have grown old. The days have dawned when you have no pleasure in them. Still the voice of Infinite Pity cries, "Come to Me, and I will refresh you." Oh ! may the Holy Spirit draw you to Christ this day.

## II.

### THE REPENTANT SINNER AT HER SAVIOUR'S FEET.

ST. LUKE vii. 36.

And one of the Pharisees desired Him that he would eat with him. And He went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

And stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him : for she is a sinner.

And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.

There was a certain creditor which had two debtors : the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most ?

Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman ? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet : but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped the with the hairs of her head.

Thou gavest me no kiss : but this woman since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

My head with oil thou didst not anoint : but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven ; for she loved much : but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

And they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also ?

And He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee ; go in peace.

A SPANISH Artist once painted a picture of the Last Supper. His intention was to make the countenance and figure of the Great Master as prominent as possible ; but, unfortunately, he placed on the table some chased cups, exceedingly beautiful and conspicuous. So when his friends came to see the picture, they all remarked, "How exceedingly beautiful those cups are !" Thereupon the Artist took his brush and rubbed all else from the canvas, leaving nothing but "*Jesus only.*" Brethren, it seems to me that Artist represents what the minister of the Gospel should be. He ought to be willing that his people should forget everything if only they know and feel that Christ is all and in all. I do not think you could find anywhere in the New Testament a more beautiful illustration of what the Saviour is, and what the Gospel does, than in the passage I have just read. This incident happened more than 1800 years ago, and yet men and women still weep at the feet of Jesus. When the Jews heard that our Lord was dead—when He had been buried—when the sepulchre had been sealed and

the watch set, they thought all was over and that the life of Jesus closed on Calvary ; but, my brethren, never were men so mistaken. The Man of Nazareth, the Christ of God, still lives, and there is nothing like the old, old story of His Cross to touch men's hearts and to turn men's lives. Music won't do it, sacraments won't do it ; it is the story of the Saviour's love and grace alone which the Holy Spirit uses to touch the hearts of sinners and to turn their lives. Do you know anything of what we have been speaking about ? Have you, like this woman, wept at the feet of Jesus ? If you have, you can pray, as David prayed (Psalm lvi. 8) : " Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle ; are they not in Thy book ? " It is a beautiful idea that God has a book, in which He records every tear and every groan of His people. Some of you weep in secret for your own sins and the sins of others, and you may forget your tears, but God does not forget them. He keeps a perpetual record of them in His book. Have you wept over your sins ? Men must weep over their sins sometime : if they do not now, they will have to weep over them in hell. " Blessed are they that mourn," said the Saviour, " for they shall be comforted" (Matt. v. 4).

This story of the penitent woman comes to my heart. And why do you think it is so ? Because I feel that I, too, have need to weep continually at the feet of my Saviour. I love the woman. What a contrast she was to the self-righteous hypocritical Pharisee, who sat so piously muttering against her and against the dear Saviour Himself ! I abominate the Pharisee, but I love

the woman. She had a broken heart, and that is the gift of God. You know how it was with Pharaoh, the proud king of Egypt. He had in his kingdom all the treasures and curiosities of the East, but there was one thing which Pharaoh did not possess, and that was a broken heart. His heart was as hard as the nether mill-stone, and what were all his treasures in comparison with this? A broken and a contrite heart is the very best thing God can bestow. He gives many gifts to others, but this is the treasure which He keeps for His own people, and He had given it to this woman. She could have said what we sometimes sing—

A broken heart, my God, my King,  
Is all the sacrifice I bring ;  
The God of grace will ne'er despise  
A broken heart for sacrifice.

And sure I am, that when the dear Master saw her tears, the sign of her broken and contrite heart, when He beheld her weeping at His feet, He saw of the travail of His soul and was satisfied.

What did this poor woman do to show her love? If you love anybody you like to be in their society, and you like to give them, may I not say—the best you have—anything? And so this woman brought the best she had—an alabaster box of ointment. A selfish worldling might have said (as Judas did say once), "Why was this waste of the ointment made?" But Jesus received it gladly, and we may be sure nothing is too costly for Christ. She stood *behind* Him, weeping in deep humility, her heart breaking with love, and eyes brimful of tears,

and washed His feet, and kissed them too. What did she care that other people were looking at her! She did not mind it—she thought of no one but her Saviour, and she was glad to show her love—“She *kissed His feet*.” But what is going on in the mind of (may we not say) the hypocritical Simon? Simon is thinking, and his thoughts go very fast. In this case they are interpreted into words by Him “from whom no secrets are hid.” His thoughts ran thus: “This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him, *for she is a sinner* (v. 39). You see there lay Simon’s error—he did not know himself to be a sinner—a lost, ruined, hell-deserving sinner. My brethren, if a man has not right views about sin he has right views about nothing in religion. You cannot take too strong views of sin. This man was wrong at the foundation, and the Lord told him a little parable: “There was a certain creditor which had two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence and the other fifty” (v. 40). It is my impression, that represents what each of them *thought* they owed. If you had asked the woman how much she owed—“How many are your sins?” she would have answered: “Oh, I can’t tell you how many—I can’t tell you how much I owe—five hundred pence!” Then if you had asked Simon, he would have replied: “Well, I don’t know—very little indeed—fifty pence, perhaps!” It seems to me to represent what each of them *thought* they owed, though, in reality, I am sure it was the poor woman who owed the fifty, and it was Simon who owed the five hundred. In God’s ledger I think the figures

were reversed, Simon owed five hundred pence, and the poor penitent woman owed only fifty. And what happened? "When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both" (v. 41). "Nothing to pay." Have we ever been brought to feel that, and to know it—that we owe God a great sum, and that we have "*nothing to pay?*" Have we ever been brought to feel that all our good works, prayers, tears, charities, are all "*nothing?*" Have we been brought to feel that our tears won't save us—our prayers won't save us—our good works won't save us? Have we ever realised the meaning of "*Nothing in my hand I bring?*" Those are the terms on which the Gospel must be received: "*Nothing in my hand I bring.*" If you have not come to Christ empty-handed, you have not come at all.

"When they had nothing to pay, *he frankly forgave them both.*" That is the Gospel. Our Lord now asks the question: "Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?" And the argument, as I understand it, is this: Even supposing that Simon owed fifty pence, and the woman five hundred, and they are both forgiven, which will love him most? "Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most" (v. 43). And here we see our Lord catches Simon in a net which his own crafty hands had laid: "You have been forgiven less (we will suppose it), the woman more, tell me which will love most?" Simon is caught in the trap which he had set. And now the Lord said, turning to the woman, and no doubt pointing to her as He spoke: "Seest thou this woman?"—look at her well, turn your eyes right

upon her! "I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet, but she hath washed my feet *with tears.*" Oh, brethren, tears are the best prayers. Sometimes, when we cannot pray, we still can weep over our sins, and over our ingratitude to our Heavenly Father. There's a great deal in that hymn which says—

Prayer is the burden of a sigh.

When some of you sit down and say, "Oh, that I were different! Oh, that I were saved!" I think that prayer goes up to heaven. I hope it may.

Prayer is the falling of a tear.

As we have said, tears are the best prayers—better than words.

"Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment" (v. 45, 46). "You did not kiss my *cheek*, but she has kissed my *feet*; you did not anoint my *head*, but she has anointed even my *feet*." "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much" (v. 47). Now, here comes rather a difficult question: Did the woman love Christ because she was forgiven, or was she forgiven because she loved? Or, in other words, which came first, forgiveness or love? Dear friends, there can be, I think, no manner of doubt. The forgiveness must surely have come first and then the love came afterwards; otherwise you would say that her love purchased her forgiveness, which, of course, would be utterly wrong

Christ forgave her many sins and she loved Him *much*, and He adds: "But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." If God forgives you few sins, you love Him little ; if He forgives you more sins, you love Him more. The greater the sinner has been, the more devoted, and zealous, and earnest, the saint will be. Saul of Tarsus was an instance ; he had been forgiven much, and all he could do for his Master he felt to be too little. Once the "chief of sinners," he becomes chief of the apostles.

What did the Saviour say to the woman ? "Thy faith hath saved thee ; go in peace" (v. 50); or, as it is in the Greek Testament (*eis*) "go *into* peace ;" and, my brethren, if God's Holy Spirit draw you to the Saviour's feet, to weep over your sins, that same Saviour, just as loving and as true as He ever was, will say to you even this day, "Go into peace," *i.e.*, into a peace which can never end. That will be the condition of your life—you will live in peace, die in peace, and you will be for ever in peace. This, then, is the story of the penitent woman, and a very blessed story it is—teaching us what God's grace can do. If there were no other chapter in all the Bible but this, I should still know that it is God's grace which saves souls. There were many women in that city—How was it that *this* woman was drawn to weep at the Saviour's feet? We can only answer by saying—It was *all God's grace*. It was not that she was better than others. She was a lost, ruined woman, and it was God's pity and compassion that turned her feet into the way of peace. What a wonderful thing God's grace is ! There are many things in this world that are powerful.

“Money” (Solomon says, Eccles. x. 19) “answereth all things,” though that is true only as far as this world goes. Still, money gives a wide range of influence, it will get you lots of friends—the rich man is sure to have friends, it will purchase pleasure, and very often a good name. All these things money will do. Again, eloquence is a marvellous power. See a man like George Whitfield, preaching to the colliers of Bristol, till the tears ran down their cheeks like rivers. I will tell you another thing that is very strong, and that is, the waves of the sea. I have talked to sailors, and they have told me how bars of iron have been doubled up like ropes of sand by the mere force of the waves: but I know of something, and I preach something more powerful than money, or eloquence, or the waves of the sea, and it is *the grace of God*. That can bend the most stubborn will—it can touch the hardest heart. We have had an instance of it in the story of the woman, which “was a sinner.” It is the grace of God which must begin the work in the heart, and which, when it is begun, always carries it on :

Grace all the work shall crown,  
Through everlasting days;  
It lays in heaven the topmost stone,  
And well deserves the praise.

Every time I preach, as long as I live, I wish to preach about God’s grace, and when I die and can speak no more, I believe I shall speak and sing of it in a better world.

Brethren, we shall see this poor woman of whom we

have been preaching. She is one of the Saviour's jewels, she must be saved. You and I will perhaps think of our meditation to-day when we see her, not as a sin-stained woman, but as one of the "great multitude" spoken of in Rev. vii. (of which may we all who are here form a part), standing before the throne and before the Lamb, having come out of great tribulation, and having washed their robes and made them white in the Saviour's precious blood.

The story of the woman which was a sinner brings to one's remembrance at once two instances of God's wonder-working grace.

First, the conversion of St. Augustine. Till he was thirty-two he lived in sin, feeling its torment, shame, and misery ; hating life, dreading death ; praying, even in his youth, Give me chastity and continency, *only not yet* ; crying out, O wretched man that I am ! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? and yet not able to flee from *himself*. But let us quote his own words from his celebrated "Confessions": "Thou, O Lord, didst turn me round towards myself, taking me from behind my back where I had placed me, unwilling to observe myself, and setting me before my face, that I might see how foul I was, how crooked and defiled, bespotted and ulcerous. And I beheld and stood aghast; and whither to flee from myself I found not . . . . O Lord, how long ? How long ? Lord, wilt Thou be angry, for ever ? Remember not our former iniquities, for I felt that I was held by them. I sent up these sorrowful words, How long ? How long ? 'To-morrow,' and 'To-morrow.' Why not now ? Why not is there this hour an end to my uncleanness ? So was I speaking, and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo ! I heard from a neighbouring house a voice as of boy or girl, I know not, chanting, and oft repeating, 'Take up and read ; Take up and read.' Instantly my countenance altered. I began to think most intently, whether children were wont in any kind of play to sing such words : not

could I remember ever to have heard the like. So checking the torrent of my tears, I arose ; interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find. . . . . I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell : ‘*Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying : but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh,*’ in concupiscence. No further would I read ; nor needed I : for instantly, at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.”

The other instance I alluded to is that of Brownlow North. Till nearly forty-five years old did he live without God in the world, when one night while playing at cards he became suddenly ill, and said to his son, “I am a dead man ; take me upstairs.” To quote his own words (from “Records and Recollections” of his life by the Rev. K. Moody-Stuart) : “. . . . I threw myself down on the bed. My first thought then was, Now, what will my forty-four years of following the devices of my own heart profit me ? In a few minutes I shall be in hell, and what good will all these things do me, for which I have sold my soul ? At that moment I felt constrained to pray, but it was merely the prayer of the coward, a cry for mercy. I was not sorry for what I had done, but I was afraid of the punishment of my sin. And yet still there was something trying to prevent me putting myself on my knees to call for mercy, and that was the presence of the maid-servant in the room, lighting my fire. Though I did not believe at that time that I had ten minutes to live, and knew that there was no possible hope for me but in the mercy of God, and that if I did not seek that mercy I could not expect to have it, yet such was the nature of my heart and of my spirit within me, that it was a balance with me, a thing to turn this way or that, I could not tell how, whether I should wait till that woman left the room, or whether I should fall on my knees and cry for mercy in her presence. By the grace of God I did put myself on my knees before that girl, and I believe it was the turning point with me.” But not at once did Brownlow North find peace with God. He passed through a terrible time of temptation, especially with regard to the very

*existence* of God. And when, through grace, he felt and believed the truth of God's *being*, it led him to make "God is" the motto of his life, and certainly the keynote of his preaching. And now, to quote once more from his life : "I was reading the third chapter of Romans ; and as I read the twentieth and following verses, a new light seemed to break in on my soul. 'By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in God's sight.' That I knew. But then I went on to read, 'But now, *now* the righteousness of God *without the law* is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets ; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ *unto all and upon all them that believe : for there is no difference.*' With that passage light came into my soul. Striking my book with my hand, and springing from my chair, I cried, 'If that Scripture is true, I am a saved man ! That is what I want ; that is what God offers me ; that is what I will have.' God helping me, it was that I took : THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WITHOUT THE LAW. It is my ONLY hope."

### III.

## SIN'S WRETCHEDNESS AND THE POWER OF GRACE.

ROMANS v. 20.

Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.

“SIR, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field ? from whence then hath it tares ?” are words which have been wrung again and again from thousands of anxious hearts, while the only answer to be given is, An enemy hath done this. We must be content with two facts : first, that sin has entered into the world, and, secondly, that there is a remedy of God’s own providing. There may be some here who say, My life abounds with sin ; my very thoughts and imagination are polluted ; I make vows, promises, and resolutions, but I feel like a man in the arms of a giant, I cannot get away from myself. Now our text contains comfortable words ; it tells you grace does much more abound, and that grace, so rich, so full, so free, can break your galling fetters, and give you a secret power over your lusts and passions ; it has done so for millions, and Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by Him. I want to give you five illustrations of the text.

I. The first shall be St. Paul. Open your Bible at the ninth chapter of the Acts, and see how in his case sin abounds. He breathes out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, and goes to the high priest for authority to bring any Christians at Damascus bound unto Jerusalem. Now turn to 1 Timothy i. 13, and you will not wonder that there, speaking of his ungodly days, he says, "I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious." But see how "grace does much more abound." As he journeys and comes near Damascus, there suddenly shines round about him a light from heaven and a voice reaches his ears, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" It is Jesus, Jesus the Lord of glory, and Jesus the sinner's friend, who has appeared to him, and at once the lion is turned into the lamb—"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Whence comes this mighty change? Acts ix. 15 tells us, "He is *a chosen vessel unto me*:" 1 Cor. xv. 10 tells us, "By the *grace* of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain:" 1 Timothy i. 14 tells us, "The *grace* of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

II. My second example shall be the thief on the cross. In St. Matthew and St. Mark it is expressly stated that *both* the thieves at first reviled our Lord, but at length the heart of one becomes wonderfully and suddenly changed. While he lived a sinful robber's life among the rocks and caves he may have heard Jesus preach, and invite the weary and heavy-laden to Him for rest: and in the agony of death those words of

eternal life may have come back and touched his heart with a strange power, and prompted the prayer of penitence and faith, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." Whether that was so or not, we must ascribe the salvation of this once hardened sinner to the sovereign power of God. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

III. My third illustration shall be the prodigal son. Watch his course as related in St. Luke xv., and note his downward steps. He took his journey into a far country—he wasted his substance with riotous living—he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country. So one sin leads to another. At last in the depths of degradation and despair, the wonder-working grace of God turns his heart. "I will arise and go to my father," says he, and, consulting none of his old companions, nor heeding any doubts and fears he might have as to how his father would receive him, *at once* he takes the decisive step. Note well how grace abounds in his father's heart. As Matthew Henry beautifully says, "Here were *eyes* of mercy, and those eyes quick-sighted; 'when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him,' before any other of the family were aware of him, as if from the top of some high tower he had been looking the way his son had gone, with such a thought as this, O that I could see yonder wretched son of mine coming home! . . . . Here were *feet* of mercy, and those feet quick-paced; 'he ran'; this notes how swift God is to show mercy. . . . . Here were *arms* of mercy, and those arms stretched out to embrace him, 'he fell on his neck. . . . .' Here are

*lips of mercy, 'he kissed him;'* this kiss not only assured him of his welcome, but sealed his pardon ; his former follies shall be all forgiven, and not mentioned against him, nor is one word said by way of upbraiding." Write, then, across this blessed parable—"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

IV. My fourth illustration shall be the woman of Samaria. Her history you will find in St. John iv. I am foolish enough to believe that Christ went to the well of Sychar that day at twelve o'clock on *purpose* to meet her. He only asked for a cup of cold water, but, alas ! that seems refused, for, instead of at once giving it to the Stranger, she begins to argue. He tells her of

The waterbrooks of life that make  
The weary thirst no more,

and then, half in banter, half in earnest, she says, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." But Christ wants to convince her of sin, and so says, "Go, call thy husband, and come hither." That seemed a common-place remark enough, but it was meant to awaken in her heart the sad story of her life of shame, and it had that effect. "I perceive that Thou art a prophet," she says, after a few more words from Him. He has touched her in a sore place, and she owns the justice of His words. You see the Lord brings home to her a *special sin, adultery*, and makes her feel its bitterness. Now, my brethren, I do not know what your sins may be, but I think if the Holy Spirit were to work in your hearts He would take *one particular sin*, and make you feel its sting. And then you will say, Thou hast set my

secret sin in the light of Thy countenance : behold I am vile : wash me, Saviour, or I die. But whenever you read the blessed story of the Samaritan woman, remember my text to-day—"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

V. Illustration number five shall be—myself. When I think of my past life I see sin abounding. Sins of thought (oh! how does that prayer suit me, "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit"), sins of word and deed, sin mixed up with and marring even the most holy services ! Unclean, unclean ! "God be merciful to me *the sinner*." But I can thank Him for that "*much more*." Often and often "my feet were almost gone ; my steps had well-nigh slipped." But however high the tide of my sin has risen, the tide of God's grace has risen higher, and I am sure

Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
Wand'ring from the fold of God,  
He, to rescue me from danger,  
Interpos'd His precious blood.  
  
Oh ! to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be !  
Let that grace, now, like a fetter,  
Bind my wand'ring heart to thee !

I pray that we may each one be able to point to our own lives and weep tears of joy, as we say, "Thank God, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

## IV. ON PRAYER.

ST. MATTHEW vii. 7.

Ask, and it shall be given unto you.

MATTHEW HENRY, the Commentator, well said that Prayer should be the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening. And, indeed, the man who lives without prayer can neither be happy nor safe. Now, if you have ever felt the weariness, the wretchedness, the loneliness that sin always brings, you will rejoice at these comfortable words, if only you may pray to be released from guilt, and freed from sin and Satan's power. "Ask, and it shall be given you."

I. For what should we ask? For the pardon of our sins—for the peace of God—for His Holy Spirit. And what more encouraging than these words can we have—If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? (St. Luke xi. 13). But may we not also pray for temporal blessings? Yes, for so our Lord teaches us—"Give us this day our daily bread," and though, no doubt, there lies behind those words a reference to the Bread of Life which alone can feed our souls, yet a prayer for daily food must be included in the petition.

You may ask for little things. God cares even for the small concerns of His people. He made the oak, and He made the lily ; He made the cedar, and He made the violet ; He made the lion, and He made the sparrow.

You cannot ask too much. He is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we *ask or think* (Eph. iii. 20). You may err in asking too little, but you cannot ask too much.

Thou art coming to a King,  
Large petitions with thee bring ;  
For His grace and power are such,  
None can ever ask too much.

But let us never forget it is the Holy Spirit alone who can help our infirmities and teach us how to pray, and what to pray for. Have you ever gone on your knees when you were alone, and no one looking at you, and said in real earnest, O God, give me Thy Holy Spirit for Jesus Christ's sake ?

II. When to pray. Are you full of joy to-day, your heart bounding with gladness ? Is your body in comfort and your soul in peace ? Now is your time for prayer. The days of darkness will come, but the darkness will not frighten you, if so be you are prepared beforehand by loving communion with your God. Are you in affliction ? Still you must pray. Ask that your trouble may be blessed to you, and then if it is sanctified you will say, Sweet affliction that brings Jesus to my soul ! Pray then, even when disinclined, and when you cannot pray for yourself, pray for others ; and while interceding for others the flame of devotion will be

lighted, and ere long you will be able to pray for yourself.

III. And what encouragements there are to those who pray ! Take such texts as these, Psalm vi. 9 ; l. 15 ; Matthew xviii. 19 ; John xvi. 23. And they who know by glad experience the power of prayer are able to say like David, " I love the Lord because He hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live." Encouragement to pray ! Surely we have enough when we count up God's promises, and see the calmness, the hopefulness, the peace which communion with Heaven always brings.

IV. Difficulties about prayer. You may say, I have prayed, and do pray, but God does not hear. Let me suggest three possible reasons why He does not answer. First, perhaps you ask nothing *definite* ! You kneel down when you have dressed yourself every morning, and before going to bed at night for a few moments or minutes, as the case may be, and you say a few words, but the words to you at least are meaningless, you ask for nothing in particular, and you have not because you ask not ! Then, again, you pray but you never *expect* an answer to your petitions, indeed, you would be surprised if God granted your request. And a third point—you ask wrong things. You would not give your child a sharp knife to play with—nor will God give you the instruments of self-destruction. Perhaps you ask for riches—now money cannot make you happier or better than you are, and therefore no wonder your prayer for

riches is unheard. Pray for God's grace, for His Holy Spirit, for pardon and peace,—to be numbered among His saints in heaven, and fed with food convenient here. Pray for these things, and see if God does not hear you !

But further, you may say—God decrees all things : if He has determined that I shall have grace, I shall have it without praying for it. What reply can we make to this ? It is true if God has determined you shall have grace, you will possess it, but supposing that besides God has decreed that you shall pray for and seek His grace ? For example, He has predestined that you shall have a harvest this year, but along with the harvest He has decreed that the rain shall moisten the ground, and the sun shall warm it, and that you shall sow the seed. So if He has purposed that you shall have grace, He has also purposed that you shall seek it.

V. Let us make our public prayers more definite. The words are elastic enough. When we say, Forgive us our trespasses, let us think of our own besetting sins, and the sins of the past week ; when we say, Graciously look upon our afflictions, let us tell God each one of our troubles and worries ; when we pray for "all sick persons," remember some specially ; or when we say, "Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of Thy servants," let us try to think what our desires and petitions severally are. And thus our Common Prayers will have a new light thrown upon them, and Divine service will become more reasonable and intelligent.

And, finally, let us pray for each other. If St. Paul

had need to say, brethren, pray for us, how much more do I need and long for your prayers? And, brethren, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you (1 Sam. xii. 23). You will find my prayer for you if you read Ephesians iii. 17-19. Remember the days of prayer will soon be over, so use them well while you have them, but

Our days of *praise* will ne'er be past,  
While life, or thought, or being last,  
Or immortality endures.

V.

## RICH POVERTY.

2 COR. vi. 10.

Having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

ST. PAUL was a poor man. He was born in a high position in this world, but he gave it up and suffered the loss of all things for Christ's sake. It is, indeed, right that they who administer God's Word should be supported by their people, for the labourer is worthy of his hire. As the Apostle says in 1 Cor. ix. 11, "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" And again in verse 14, "Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel. *But I have used none of these things.*" He was never paid for preaching. You will say, How then did he live? It was the custom among the Jews to teach their sons a trade (they said, He that teaches not his son a trade, does the same as if he taught him to be a thief), and this is how St. Paul learned tent-making (Acts xviii. 3). They used to make tents from the hair-cloth of Cilician goats. Having no income of his own he was dependent on God for his daily bread, and could have truthfully sung,

No foot of land do I possess,  
No cottage in this wilderness,  
A poor, wayfaring man.

St. Paul then was very poor. But do you think he referred to this poverty in our text—having nothing? He may have done so in some measure, but I am pretty sure he meant something more. Besides, if you look at the words before our text, he says—"As poor, yet making many rich," there he simply meant though he was poor in this world's goods, yet he was the means of making many rich for the next world. But here in our text I fancy he refers more especially to his spiritual state, to the condition of his soul. And if you will turn to 2 Cor. xii. 11, he uses very similar words, "Though I be *nothing!*"

I. "HAVING NOTHING." That is not man's opinion of himself by nature. Man by nature echoes the words of the Laodicean Church, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing!" But God says, Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, or as it is in the Greek Testament, *the wretched one!*—thou, even thou who thinkest thyself so rich, and happy, and pure, thou art *the wretched one*, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked! (Rev. iii. 17). And it is only when God's Holy Spirit teaches us that we know and feel that we really are *nothing*, and have nothing of our own, but our sins. Was it not so with St. Paul? Read what he says in 1 Cor. xv., "By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they

all :" now note how he stops himself lest he should appear to ascribe anything to his own power—" *Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*" And if you ask me what is the perfection of Christian experience, I should say, it may be found in the well-known line—" *Nothing in my hand I bring.*" When we are taught by God's Spirit we then can say from our hearts :

Oh ! to be nothing—nothing, only to lie at His feet,  
A broken, emptied vessel, thus for His use made meet !  
Emptied that He might fill me, as to His service I go—  
Broken, so that unhinder'd through me His life may flow.

II. " POSSESSING ALL THINGS." Does it not seem a flat contradiction ? " Having nothing, and yet possessing all things !" Now, suppose an infidel who has never read the Bible happened to open the New Testament at this sixth chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, and his eye fell on this list of seeming contradictions—" Unknown, and yet well-known ; dying, and behold, we live ; chastened, and not killed ; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing ; poor, yet making many rich ; having nothing, yet possessing all things," what would he think ? He would say at once, The man who wrote this is a fool. Alas ! " the natural man"—that is, the unconverted man, man in his natural state—" receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: *for they are foolishness unto him*" (1 Cor. ii. 14). Now, what do the words mean—Having nothing, and yet possessing all things ? Let me untie the knot for you. The man, who by God's grace feels he is nothing, and has nothing in himself, may possess all things *in Christ!* My breth-

ren, you must learn to look for salvation outside yourselves ! “ In Christ” is the secret of it all. He has grace to adorn you, gold to enrich you, balm to heal you, bread to nourish you, happiness to crown you, Himself to satisfy you ! Let me refer you to three texts. First, Col. ii. 10, Ye are complete in Him, or as the word exactly means, Ye are filled up, ye are filled full in Him ; that is, Christ is all you need ; everything you can possibly want is treasured up in Him. Do you want Righteousness ?—a Righteousness in which you can appear before a holy God. It can only be found in Jesus. You own righteousness is “ filthy rags.” His righteousness is unto all and upon all them that believe. It is the “ white robe ” which all must wear who enter the gates of Paradise. It is the wedding-garment which every one must put on if they would sit down at the marriage-supper of the Lamb. Do you want wisdom ?—wisdom for all times and all circumstances, you will find it in Christ. Do you want strength?—strength wherewith to resist the devil and the world and the flesh. You may as well try to chain the waves of the sea as struggle against sin and Satan in your own strength. But you will find grace sufficient in Christ. Do you want happiness ?—there is no happiness under the sun, or beneath the skies. Real, solid, lasting joy is only in the Saviour.

Remember what St. Paul says in the third chapter of his Epistle to the Philippians. That Epistle was written when he was an old man, and looking forward to the day when he should finish his course. What is his last

wish? "I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, *and be found in Him!*" Remember, too, what St. Paul says to the Ephesians in the first chapter. He says they are "*accepted in the Beloved.*" And then if you put these three texts together, you will there see what it is to possess all things in Christ. And let me add—Just as much as you know of the first part of the text—"having nothing," will you know of the second part of the text—"possessing all things." And if you are able to say from your heart—

"Nothing in my hand I bring,"  
you will soon joyfully add—  
"Simply to Thy Cross I cling."

## VI.

### HOW TO SWEETEN BITTER THINGS.

#### EXODUS xv. 23-25.

And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter : therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink ? And he cried unto the Lord ; and the Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.

I NEED not remind you that this is a scene from the wilderness-life of the children of Israel. More than two millions of people—a barren desert—blazing sun and burning sands—nothing to drink for three days—men, women, children, cattle, dying of thirst ! Now they see the water sparkling afar, and hasten forwards—alas it is so bitter they cannot drink it. They call the place Marah. Some of you may here see your own portrait. You used to say, If I could only get that or live there, I should be supremely happy. But when your wish was realised, the root of the pleasant plant was wormwood. The orange-blossoms frosted. You called it Marah.

While the children of Israel murmured, Moses prayed. He cried to the Lord, Who is a very present help in trouble : His hand is never shortened : His ear is never heavy. God shewed Moses a tree, and when cast into the waters it made them sweet and wholesome.

I want to give you practical advice this day. Let me mention some things which sin has embittered, and tell you how to sweeten them.

I. There is your business, your shop, your farm. From these things you might have expected a harvest of pleasure. Instead of which, how much you have to vex and worry ! bad weather, bad debts, bad news, and so your pleasant things become bitter. What can sweeten these brackish waters ?

— there's a wonder-working wood,  
I've heard believers say,  
Can make these bitter waters good  
And take the curse away.

The Cross on which the Saviour died  
And conquer'd for His saints,  
This is the tree, by faith applied,  
Which sweetens all complaints.

Yes—the Tree of Life, the Cross of Calvary, in other words, the Christ of God, the Friend of Sinners Himself, He can sweeten all the cares of everyday life, and smooth with His dear Hand all our difficulties. If Christ were to come into your heart and into your life, these brackish waters of which you are drinking now would become clear and sweet as the crystal stream which flows from the throne of God and the Lamb ! The Son of Man can heal. Come, then, Emmanuel, heal us, touch us !

Note, God *shewed* Moses the tree. And thus the Holy Spirit must reveal Christ in all His beauty to us, or we shall never see Him ! And the tree was cast *into*

the waters. So Christ must be formed *in* us. And then life will be sweet indeed. The poor man who gains a few pence each day by sweeping the crossing, or who gets a scanty livelihood by breaking stones on the road, if he knows Christ, is more to be envied than the millionaire who lives without God in the world.

II. There are your children. You thought they would fill your home and heart with joy, but, alas ! you see them going to ruin as fast as sin can take them. You see them wasting their substance in riotous living. They mind earthly things. They heed not your entreaties. They regard not your warnings. What can you do ? Do what St. Augustine's mother did for her son—pray. Pray without ceasing for them. Who can tell but that through your intercessions, God's grace may turn their feet into the way of peace ? Remember what was said to Augustine's mother, It is not possible that the son of these tears should perish. And though she had to wait long for her wayward child to be brought home to God, she did not wait in vain. When he was thirty-two, and a year before she died herself, she witnessed his conversion. Is anything too hard for the Lord ? Cannot He turn your bitterness into gladness and rejoicing ?

III. Now look at yourself. Let me suppose—you feel more and more your own helplessness, unworthiness, and wretchedness in continually yielding to temptation. You loathe yourself for your abominations, and long to be delivered from this body of sin and death. Your life would be all brightness if you could but be pure and holy. Here is the remedy—the remedy of God's own

providing—The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. The faithful saying is as true as ever—Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And yet again, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us. Are not these words (if made real to the heart by the Holy Spirit) able to give sweet comfort to those whose life is embittered by the black waters of sin?

Or it may be, sickness is your cross. You are never well. Your nerves are weak. You envy the high spirits and even temper of others. Bad health is the thorn in your flesh. But recollect the case of St. Paul, as recorded in 2 Cor. xii. 9. What his "thorn" was we cannot say. Almost every conceivable supposition has been made: some have thought it was temptations of the devil to doubt and despair, others that it was lusts of the flesh; but perhaps it was some bodily disorder, either an impediment in his speech, or blindness, or some sharp pain. Three times did he pray that it might depart. At last the answer came—and every word is a pearl—"My grace—is sufficient—for thee!" Now, if you are a partaker of God's grace, you may add like the Apostle, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Even affliction and sickness will be sweet if you know and feel that if your earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved you have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (2 Cor. v. 1).

IV. The waters of death—unless, indeed, Christ come

first—are before us all. Can the bitter streams of Jordan be sweetened? I have heard of a preacher who said, What can a man do when death comes? *Let him pluck up his courage.* Alas! he must be strong indeed who can pluck up his courage when the king of terrors is clutching at his heart-strings! That will never give him peace at the last. Or will it give a man comfort to look back on a well-spent life? A lifetime given to Christ is a blessed thing indeed, but even that of itself will not cheer man's fainting heart in his last hour. Or, will it sweeten death to be able to say, I came to church, I took the sacrament, I did my best. O, sirs, if you have nothing more than these things to rest upon, you will only cry bitter—bitter—bitter! “Father, you are comfortable now?” said one of his sons to a dying clergyman. And he replied, “Oh yes, I lie so comfortably, resting on the finished work of Christ.” Yes, verily, death will have no bitterness for you, and the grave no gloom, if you live and die *trusting in what Jesus has done.*

My brethren, God is even merciful in giving us bitter water to drink on earth. If the streams below were sweet we should never seek the water which Jesus gives to thirsty souls. But all springs beneath are poisoned with sin, therefore drink of the river which makes glad the city of God. “Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

But in heaven, the home of God's elect, the Lamb leads all the ransomed to living fountains of water—there are no Marah's, no bitter waters yonder—for the name of the city shall be, “Jehovah-Shammah, the Lord is there.”

## VII.

“THEY GAVE THEMSELVES;”

OR,

THE CHURCHES OF MACEDONIA A PATTERN FOR  
ALL CHRISTIANS.

2 COR. viii. 5.

They first gave their own selves to the Lord.

SOME of you may have heard of the late excellent Mrs. Ranyard and her work. She was the foundress of Bible-women and Bible-nurses. When a girl of sixteen she was taken by her parents to a Bible-meeting at Wanstead, and they stayed with the family who entertained the speakers. There were several daughters ; one of whom, Elizabeth Saunders, had given up herself entirely to the blessed work of bringing souls to Jesus, and she it was who, by the grace of God, first sowed the seeds of eternal life in Ellen Ranyard’s young heart. I will give you the account in her own words :—

One morning I sat at a table drawing. We were alone ; and she said to me, “Ellen, dear, have you ever thought what you will do with your life?”

“Do with my life?” I answered. “Well, I hope I shall go on cultivating my mind and my faculties ; that is all I have thought about yet.”

"Yes ; but have you thought that this cultivation is to enable you the better to live for others—not for yourself—and that you must live to do something in God's service?"

"Perhaps you mean in a Sunday-school? My mother will not let me teach there. She says such work is only for converted people ; and I am not converted. I like worldly reading, such as the "Literary Gazette," and Lord Byron's poetry ; and I wish to see more of the world before I leave it, especially of its books."

"Then you mean to leave it some time? I wonder what, my dear, you know about the best of books? Do you love your Bible at all?"

"I have read it through three times. I seem to know all about it. Yes, certainly I love it ; but one cannot always be reading one's Bible."

"I suppose you never have thought how many of the poor people who live in the streets not far from you have no Bibles to read?" [This was in the year 1826.]

I answered, "No ; I have never thought of that ; but I liked your Bible-meeting very much the other day at Wanstead."

"Would you like to leave your painting this morning and go with me to find out how many want a Bible?"

"Yes ; I should like to go anywhere with you."

They went out together, and Ellen Ranyard heard her friend tell of the love of Christ to the consumptive and the dying ; and the Spirit carried the message home to her soul. Her friend caught typhus fever, and died soon afterwards ; and from that hour Ellen Ranyard took up

the Bible work, giving herself to her Lord. And now I put that solemn question to every young soul here now, *Have you ever thought what you will do with your life?* The great want of the day is whole-hearted, decided Christians. We have too many lukewarm professors who would fain hold Christ in one hand, and the world in the other. In the Bible there are many instances of real self-dedication : Moses, who might have been a Prince in Egypt, but who chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God ; and Caleb who followed the Lord *fully*; and Ruth who professed : “ Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God;” David who dared address his God—“ My heart is *fixed*;” and St. Paul who asked, “ Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do ?”—and there are multitudes like these, both in and out of sacred story, of whom the world was not worthy, who gave themselves *altogether* to their God. And it was this that the Macedonian converts did. They first *gave their own selves* to the Lord. Let me tell you five things about this blessed surrender of ourselves to Christ.

I. It is a complete surrender. There must be no reserve. A man will give God many things, without giving *himself*. “ My son, give Me thine *heart*”—and the heart includes all. Body and soul, time, money, talents, rank, must be laid in sacrifice at the Feet of Jesus. It is the pride of our natural heart that hinders this glorious surrender. I shall speak what I like, and do what I like, and go where I like, I shall please myself, that is what we all say by nature. And it is only when God’s grace comes into our hearts that we ask, What would *Christ* have me do ?

II. It is a wise surrender. Is it wise to serve sin? No, for with sin God has linked suffering. Suffering follows sin as surely as the shadow follows the sun. It makes a man feel wretched and unhappy. It ever brings a sense of *loneliness*—the soul feels alone in the world beneath the burning eye of an angry God. O, the slavery of sin! Happy the day when Jesus delivers us from it, and takes us into His service which is “perfect freedom.” It is then we become “*wise* unto Salvation.” The world laughs at the Christian now, and thinks him weak and silly, but at the Day of Judgment those who now persecute him will groan and say, We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour, now he is numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the Saints!

III. It is a loving surrender. “The love of Christ constraineth us.” And that is the only motive which ever impelled a human soul to give itself to its Saviour, or to suffer for Him. There was the “noble army of martyrs,” among that glorious band was many a sensitive woman, as timid and nervous as any of you, who yet dared to die for the Name and Gospel of Jesus. They went to the stake, they gave their bodies to be burned, and fell asleep among the flames as calmly as if they had been lying on beds of roses. Why was this? They *loved* the Master, and so rejoiced in even dying in His cause. And if we love Him we shall be glad to do *anything* for Him. We all want to do great things. I sometimes think that if God were to send an angel from Heaven to find the one who was serving God the best on earth, it would not

be some great man, of whom religious people talk so much, but perhaps he would go to some dark garret where a poor invalid dwells, who can do nothing for God except pray for His servants and His work.

IV. It is a joyful surrender. Dedication of the soul to Christ does not render life insipid or gloomy. It ennobles it by making it pure and holy. And, indeed, the sweetest and most lasting pleasures are those which flow from the service of God and the friendship of Christ. They who have served Him longest and best gladly give their cheerful testimony that His ways are ways of pleasantness, and all His paths are peace. Listen to what the late William Jay of Bath wrote, when seventy-four—“Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life. My duties have not been irksome. My trials have been few compared with my comforts. My pleasures have been cheap and simple, and therefore very numerous. I have enjoyed without satiety the seasons and the scenery of Nature. I have relished the bounties of Providence, using them with moderation and thankfulness. I have delighted in the means of grace; unutterable have been my delights in studying and perusing the Scriptures. How have I verified the words of Young, ‘Retire, and read thy Bible to be gay.’”

V. It is an eternal surrender. The Mosaic law permitted those who wished it to enter into a compact with their masters of perpetual servitude. “If the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him unto

the door, or unto the door-post ; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall serve him for ever " (Exodus xxi. 5, 6). *He shall serve him for ever!* Those words are equally true of all Christ's servants. Once the slave of sin, the child of grace now rejoices like St. Paul to style himself *the slave of Christ*, whom he will serve *for ever!* On earth he serves with a poor, feeble, cold service, but in heaven it will be with the burning zeal of a seraph, and he will be one of those of whom we read—"They are before the throne of God, and *serve Him day and night in His temple.*"

"They first gave their own selves to the Lord." How was that? What led them so to do? The first verse of this chapter tells us—"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the GRACE of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia." So that *before* the "*first*" of the fifth verse we must put the "*Grace of God*," which, indeed, is the source and spring of all human goodness.

"First" of all, the "*grace of God*" comes into the soul, and that grace shews the evil of sin and the beauty of the Saviour, and then the heart becomes in love with Jesus and gives itself to Him. O Christ, Thou matchless beauty, take the soul Thou hast made ; stamp it with Thy seal, and mark it for Thine Own.

"They first gave their own selves to the Lord," and "*then unto us by the will of God.*" First, self-consecration, and then work in the vineyard. First, "Come unto Me," then, "Take My yoke upon you."

And now you will be able to *pray* those exquisitely beautiful words of Frances Havergal—

*They Gave Themselves.*

Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.

Take my moments and my days,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move,  
With the impulse of Thy love.

Take my feet, and let them be  
Swift and "beautiful" for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing  
Always, only, for my King.

Take my lips, and let them be  
Filled with messages from Thee.

[I have a copy of this hymn hanging in the vestry, and oh ! what a blessed prayer do these last two lines make before speaking for the Master ; I generally say them before I come into church.]

Take my silver and my gold,  
Not a mite would I withhold.

Take my intellect, and use  
Every power as Thou dost choose.

Take my will, and make it Thine !  
It shall be no longer mine.

Take my heart, it is Thine own !  
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour  
At Thy feet its treasure store.

Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, *only*, ALL, for Thee !

## VIII.

### "TILL HE COME."

I COR. xi. 26.

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death, till He come.

THE Lord's Supper is the connecting link between the first and second coming of Christ. It speaks of the past, of His broken body and His outpoured blood. It points to the future, to that day when He will be glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe; "for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death, *till He come.*" And thus the sacred Feast becomes a golden chain, stretching from the first to the second advent of the dear Redeemer.

But I intended more especially to draw your attention to those three sweet words with which this text ends, "Till He Come."

It is remarkable how much St. Paul says in his Epistles about this second coming. It is put forth as the hope of the Christian. He is not told so much to look forward to dying (though he is represented as having the assurance that if his earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, he has a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens), but one Object is flashed

before his eyes for Whom he is to watch and wait, and He is the coming King. Take a few texts and you will see my meaning. 1 Thess. i. 9, 10 : "Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God ; *and to wait for His Son from heaven.*" iv. 15-17 : "We which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first : *then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up, together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*" 2 Thess. iii. 5 : "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and *into the patient waiting for Christ.*" Titus ii. 11-13 : "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world, *looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*" Listen to one more text from 2 Tim. iv. 8 : "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but *unto all them also that love His appearing.*" We shall then *see* Him ! Every one who has ever loved Christ has longed to *see* Him. "Abraham rejoiced to *see* My day," says our Lord, of His first coming, "He saw it and was glad." And so we shall *see* Him. Now it is "through a glass darkly, but then" (note the contrast, the *now* and the *then!*) "face to face" (1 Co-

xiii. 12). And "we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him ; for we shall *see Him as He is*" (1 John iii. 2). If eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived the things God now reveals to His people by His Spirit, how grand and glorious must those things be that He has prepared to be enjoyed by all who love Him through a never-ending eternity. If St. Peter was ravished and lost in wonder at the glimpse of heaven on the Mount of Transfiguration, how will our hearts rejoice when we see Him as He is ! Let others have the streets of gold, and the pearly gates, and the crystal sea, but let us *see Him, and be with Him for ever !* "The Lamb is all the glory of Immanuel's land."

My brethren, is this *your* hope? Is the coming of Jesus and the glory that shall follow, *real* to you? Ah! men talk as if pounds, shillings, pence, rank, honour and pleasure, were the only realities ; but these things are all unreal—dying, fading, passing away. And if you are steadfastly looking for the return of the Saviour, what is this world to you? What are all its mountains of gold, all its great cities, all its pleasant pictures? You will say, I want the crown which the saints of God will wear ; I want to dwell in the New Jerusalem ; above all, I want to see Christ. Oh, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly !

Why has He tarried so long? Eighteen hundred and forty-six years have rolled their tedious days since He went up in the clouds, and still He remains away. The love of many has waxed cold, and the scoffer has gained courage, and says—

Where tarries He, the Power who said,  
Behold, I make all things new !

But there are three reasons why He delays. The first is, to exercise the patience of His people. They are commanded to watch continually, because He may come at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning. Another reason why He delays is that His elect may be gathered in. He is bringing them home one by one, and when the last prodigal is come to the Father's house the Bridegroom will return and bear His bride away. But I think there is one more reason : it is to show His long-suffering to the world. Take such texts as these : "Despisest thou the riches of His goodness and *forbearance and long-suffering*, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Rom. ii. 4). "God . . . endureth *with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath*, fitted to destruction" (ix. 22). "I gave her space to repent . . . and she repented not" (Rev. ii. 21). From this last verse it would seem God gives men space to repent, even where He does not bestow repentance.

Christ will bring the day. It is night now, but the night is far spent ; and in His light we shall see light. He will bruise Satan—He will remove the curse from the animal creation—the heart sickens to hear of and see man's cowardly cruelty to those whom he is in duty bound to be kind and gentle to. Truly, the dark places of the earth (and of England besides, among the nations) are full of the habitations of cruelty. But King Jesus will come and wipe away creation's tears and still her

groans (Rom. viii. 28). His last word is, "Surely, I come quickly." Then, "now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Each true Christian amongst us may sing—

I am nearer my home to-day,  
Than I ever have been before.

Dear brethren, examine yourselves. If an angel came here now and told us Christ will come to-night, should you be glad or sorry? Should you say in your heart—Now there is an end to my unlawful gains, and unlawful pleasures, I am not prepared to meet Him. Or could you say—I am so glad He is coming, I have waited for Him many a weary day and many a weary year, and now He will come and save me, and avenge me of my adversary, and I shall rejoice in His Salvation, so I will wait with untold joy to hear His footfall this night! Do we not pray, "Thy kingdom come," and is that not a petition that Jesus may return? If you cannot or do not pray for Christ to come, it shows you do not love Him, it shows you do not serve Him.

We are now about to show the Lord's death, "Till He Come." There are two pictures, bread and wine. The bread is a picture of His Body, the wine is a picture of His Blood. Christ is not present on that table Himself, if He were we should not need to take the Sacrament in *remembrance* of Him. We do not look at the photographs of our friends when they are with us, but when they are away. And so the bread and the wine are simple yet beautiful emblems of an absent Saviour. But though not present on the table, I pray He may be

with us in our hearts, and reveal Himself to us by His Spirit, as He does not to the world.

Who may come to the Lord's table? Who is fit to draw near? Every one who from his heart can say, "I do not presume to come to this Thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in my own righteousness, but in Thy manifold and great mercies." Every one will be welcome there who can kneel down and say, I am a poor, lost sinner, but I rejoice in the faithful saying, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, *of whom I am chief!*"

## IX.

### OUR FATHER'S HOME.

ST. JOHN xiv. 1—3.

Let not your heart be troubled : ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions—if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.

WHEN Jesus uttered these words He was going away —He was going to leave His disciples, and therefore He wanted to comfort them, and so He told them not to let their heart be troubled, for in His Father's House, (and therefore in *their* Father's House) were many mansions, that He would by no means have deceived them (“if it were not so, I would have told you”), and that He was going to prepare a place for them, and would come again, and receive them unto Himself, that where He is, there they might be also. Brethren, it seems to me these words lift our thoughts and hearts heavenwards, and I think they are the very words we want to comfort us. And who but Christ *can* comfort? We read in the Gospel of a funeral party which Jesus met at the gate of Nain. A widow's only son was carried to burial. He meets the poor mother, and says,

"Weep not." Oh ! who but Jesus could say that? If I said it I should only mock the mourner, but Jesus can say it because He is able to help—and He showed His right to say it by raising the dead.

Let us now consider the words in their order. "Let not your heart be troubled : Ye believe in God, *believe also in Me.*" Settle it down in your minds that it is for believers, and for *believers only* that Jesus has gone to prepare a place in Heaven. What is it then to believe in Christ? Are all who say the Creed in Church on Sunday believers? No, for with the *heart*, not with the lip, man believeth unto righteousness. To believe in Christ unto Salvation is to trust entirely to His finished work. It is to believe what He says concerning Himself in the Gospel—to take, for example, these words in John xvii. 4, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do"—if I believe in Jesus, I believe *He did all things necessary for my Salvation*—and that there is *nothing left for me to do*. I simply *trust His Own Word*, and I am *saved*. The Father's House is the heritage of all believers. "In my Father's House"—in my Father's *Home*—"are many mansions." What a word that word home is! How it makes our hearts thrill, and how it sends our thoughts back to the home of our childhood. O sweet word!—it means love, a fireside where all is peace. But however happy our home on earth is, if we are Christians, we have a far, far happier home in Heaven. There Christ, our Elder Brother, waits for us. There friends meet and never part. And I often think one of the sweetest things in Heaven will be to tell each

other how our Heavenly Father called us by His grace, and how He helped us on earth. God has told us something about this Home in His Word.

It is a home of perfect light. Here we see through a glass darkly, and there are many mysteries, the mystery of sin, the mystery of suffering. There all is clear. The Master Himself promises, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

It is a home of perfect purity. Every thought of every soul is holy. Impurity finds no place within the golden city. No heart sighs, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The old enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil are conquered for ever.

It is a home of perfect rest. No more doubts, temptations, or fears.

Then I shall bathe my weary soul  
In seas of heavenly rest,  
And not a wave of trouble roll  
Across my peaceful breast.

Once more, it is a home of perfect happiness. O happy souls who have left a body of sin and death behind! They never want; they never weary; they never weep. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and *God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*" Yes, God Himself shall do it, He will not call the Archangel Gabriel and say to him, "Go thou and wipe the tears from that poor sinner's eyes:" He will not send a

flaming seraph from before His throne to perform this act of love, but the Christ of God Himself with the hands once nailed on Calvary will wipe the latest tear from every ransomed sinner's eye: "God shall wipe away all tears."

"Many mansions"—it is in the Greek, many *abiding places*, which means that all who once enter the Temple of God above will "go no more out." For ever with the Lord! For ever serving—for ever singing.

When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we first begun.

"I go to prepare a place for you." Christ is the Fore-runner, and He has gone before to make ready our home with His own hands. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also." And that will be Heaven. It makes no difference whether His people die, or whether Jesus comes Himself the second time, and they meet Him in the air, in either case they will be *with Him*, and His presence makes the fulness of glory. "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am." O dear brothers and sisters, do you care to spend half an hour in Christ's presence now, if not, how could you bear to be a whole eternity with Him?

Unless Jesus comes Himself, we ourselves must go

through the valley of the shadow of death. But it is not dark, for the light of grace and glory shines quite through it, for all who love the Saviour's name. There are, however, some of God's children who through fear of death are all their lifetime subject to bondage. They love the Canaan beyond, but they fear the Jordan between. Let such be assured that when flesh and heart shall fail, Christ will be the strength of their heart and their portion for ever.

Have the doors of the heavenly mansion lately opened and drawn in one dear to you? You are desolate and lonely, but lift up your heart. If found "in Him," your friend is not lost but gone before. Would you bring back that happy spirit from the presence of its Saviour, and the companionship of angels, and the streets of gold, to this poor world of sin and suffering? No! but rather think of the happy meeting and recognition in the heavenly home. And it is true of all God's servants—

They shall be brought with gladness great  
And mirth on every side,  
Into the palace of the King,  
And there they shall abide.

But one thing is very certain—only, they can enter heaven who have washed away in the blood of the Lamb all stains of earthliness and sin. If Christ washes us not, we can have no part in the holy city; we can never join in keeping the endless Sabbath of the skies.

Let God's people remember that yet a "little while," and the Desire of Nations will return to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.

Then we shall have sinned our last sin, and sin will vex us no more ; we shall have prayed our last prayer, and the days of eternal praise will have come ; our last earthly communion over, and now the Father's House, the church of the Firstborn, the communion of saints and the life everlasting.

## X.

### A SERMON FROM THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

SOLOMON'S SONG ii. 16.

My beloved is mine, and I am his.

HAVE you ever noticed the grand difference between the Book of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon? Ecclesiastes paints in colours dark and sad the vanity of the world. The book is like a drama, or series of dissolving views, representing the royal preacher's experience. He wants happiness and peace of mind, so at one time he builds, at one time he gives himself to study, at another time to pleasure; still "the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing;" so ever and anon comes the strange refrain, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" while, on the other hand, the Song of Solomon teaches us the preciousness and the all-sufficiency of Christ. "I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting-house, and His banner over me was love. My beloved is . . . : the chiefest among ten thousand . . . He is altogether lovely." Well said St. Augustine, "Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless till it rest in Thee." Tumble the whole world

into man's heart, and yet that will not give him real lasting peace. But just as God has given man bread for his body, so He has provided the Bread of Life, Christ Jesus, to satisfy the gnawing hunger of his soul.

These words, "My beloved is mine and I am His," are certainly words of assurance. Yet there are many other passages like them in the Bible. For instance, David says, in Psalm xxvii., "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom then shall I be afraid?" And St. Paul re-echoes the words of the sweet Psalmist of Israel when he says, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day."

The exact translation of the words of my text would be, "My beloved is to me, and I am to Him." That means, what Christ is to me, and what I am to Him, is more than I can express.

And, indeed, the first step in real conversion is to feel our need of a Saviour. Christ's blood may cleanse from all sin, but what is that to me except I feel myself guilty and defiled? His righteousness may be able to clothe the most polluted soul, but I shall never put it on by faith unless I feel and know my own righteousness is as filthy rags. I shall never come to it unless I despair of finding help elsewhere.

"My beloved is mine." "Mine"—to lean upon when I feel weary. "Mine"—to bear my burden of sin and sorrow. "Mine"—to subdue my enemies. "Mine"—to deliver me from hell. "Mine"—to take me to heaven.

“Mine”—in life. “Mine”—in death. “Mine”—for ever and ever.

You cannot hold too high views of Christ. You may make too much of the Church ; you may make too much of the Sacraments ; you may make too much of the Minister ; but you cannot make too much of Christ. Our great error is in making too little of Him.

I am poor and He is rich, and so He needs my poverty on which to bestow his wealth. I am dark and He is light, and He needs my darkness to shine upon. I am weak and He is strong, and He needs my weakness to manifest the greatness of His power. Jesus needs me, and I need Him, and so we suit each other.\*

\* An old writer beautifully says, And what think you of our need of the LORD JESUS? For my part, my soul is like a hungry and thirsty child, and I need His love and consolation for my refreshment ; I am a wandering and lost sheep, and I need Him as a good and faithful Shepherd ; my soul is like a frightened dove pursued by the hawk, and I need His wounds for a refuge ; I am a feeble vine, and I need His cross to lay hold of and wind myself about ; I am a sinner, and I need His righteousness ; I am naked and bare, and need His holiness and innocence for a covering ; I am in trouble and alarm, and I need His solace ; I am ignorant, and I need His teaching ; simple and foolish, and I need the guidance of His Holy Spirit. In no situation, and at no time, can I do without Him. Do I pray? He must prompt and intercede for me. Am I arraigned by Satan at the Divine tribunal? He must be my advocate. Am I in affliction? He must be my helper. Am I persecuted by the world? He must defend me. When I am forsaken, He must be my support ; when dying, my life ; when mouldering in the grave, my resurrection. Well then, I will rather part with all the world, and all it contains, than with Thee, my Saviour ; and, God be thanked, I know that Thou, too, art neither able nor willing to do without me. Thou art rich and I am poor ; Thou hast abundance,

And if Christ is ours, all things are ours ; for so says St. Paul, in 1 Cor. iii. 21-23 : “*All things are yours ; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas.*” God’s ministers are for your profit ; “*or the world,*” the world exists for your sake ; “*or life,*” life is yours to use for Christ ; “*or death,*” death is yours, conquered by your Saviour, for you ; “*or things present,*” they will all work for your good ; “*or things to come,*” they are yours to enjoy for ever ; “*all are yours,* and ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”

“And I am His.” How are Christ’s people His ? Let me gather the answer from Holy Scripture.

I. They are His own loving choice. The words first spoken by Christ to His Apostles are certainly true of all believers alike : “Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.” Ask any true Christian in the whole world, Did Christ choose you, or did you choose Him ? and the answer would be, He chose me, and then I chose Him. Or ask, Did Christ seek you, or did you seek Him ? and the reply would be, He sought me, and then I sought and I am needy ; Thou hast righteousness, and I sins ; Thou hast wine and oil, and I wounds ; Thou hast cordials and refreshments, and I hunger and thirst. Use me then, my Saviour, for whatever purpose and in whatever way Thou mayest require. Here is my poor heart, an empty vessel, fill it with Thy grace. Here is my sinful and troubled soul, quicken and refresh it with Thy love. Take my heart for Thine abode ; my mouth to spread the glory of Thy Name ; my love, and all my powers, for the advancement of Thy honour and the service of Thy people. And never suffer the steadfastness and confidence of my faith to abate, that so at all times I may be enabled from the heart to say : *Jesus needs me, and I Him, and so we suit each other.*

Him. Or ask, Did Christ love you first, or did you love Him? and the answer would be quickly given, I love Him, because He first loved me.

Why was I made to hear Thy voice,  
And enter while there's room,  
While thousands make a wretched choice,  
And rather starve than come?

'Twas the same love that spread the feast,  
That gently forced me in,  
Else I had still refused to taste  
And perish'd in my sin.

II. They are His Father's gift. Read St. John xvii. and see how much Jesus says about those given Him by His Father. How deeply the thought entered into our Saviour's heart and prayers even just before He was going to the cross—why do not we dwell more upon it in our teaching and sermons? *You* would value the gift of a dear friend; perhaps you have a locket, or a picture, or a book given you by some one you love very much, and you treasure it on that account. So Christ cares for His people, for they were the dear gift of His Father.

III. They have given themselves to Christ. Like the people of Macedonia, each real Christian has given his own self to the Lord (2 Cor. viii. 5). O, my brethren, Have you ever done this? Have you ever on your bended knees said to the Saviour of sinners; O Christ, I am guilty, weak, and helpless: Wash me in Thy blood, give me Thy Spirit, take me as I am, and make me all I ought to be?

## 64 *A Sermon from the Song of Solomon.*

In 1875 a working man used the following words in prayer: "FATHER, *we know the REALITY of Jesus Christ.*" Could you kneel down now on the floor of this church, and say: "Father, *I* know the reality of Jesus Christ?" I want you to know Jesus, not as one may know a book, but as you know a *friend*. God spake with Moses as a man speaks with his friend. What think ye of Christ? Is He your FRIEND? Do you *know* Him? Is His name to you the sweetest Name on earth, and the sweetest Name in Heaven? or is it only a common name—a name you read in the Bible and Prayer-book—but, a name with no music, no meaning, no sweetness? Which is it? Men and brethren, answer my question this day.

Would you have peace with God—a present and eternal salvation from sin? Then "there is life in a look at the Crucified One." Yes! verily, look to Jesus, see Him groaning, dying on the Cross, and then rising from the grave to plead in Heaven for all who come to Him by faith! Look away from the sins that burden, and the trials that vex you, and gaze on the beautiful Christ, and as you behold His dying love and resurrection glory, fall down upon your knees, and say—

A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,  
On Thy kind arms I fall;  
Thou art my strength and righteousness,  
My Saviour and my all.

## XI.

### THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD:

*An Argument for Prayer and Encouragement for Work.*

HEBREWS x. 23.  
He is faithful that promised.

HOW countless are the witnesses to the faithfulness of God ! If Abraham were here to-day, he would tell us how the Lord promised him a son, how he waited patiently many years, and then at the set time God's promise was fulfilled. Or if Noah were amongst us now he would be able to speak of God's preserving care of him in the ark, and of our Father's faithfulness to him and his family. Or if the sweet Psalmist of Israel were now on earth he would sing of the goodness and mercy of his faithful God which followed him all the days of his life. And I am sure were St. Paul here, he would assure us that God was indeed faithful and stood by him when all men forsook him, and delivered him from every evil work. Time would fail to tell of the myriads who can set to their seal that Jehovah is true to His Word.

I. *If God is faithful, here is an argument for Prayer.*  
“Whatsoever,” said the Saviour, “ ye shall ask the Father in My Name, He will give it you” (St. John xvi. 23). Now people often say, “If God ordains I shall

have anything, I shall have it whether I ask or not. My prayer cannot alter God's decree." We answer, God ordains ends, but He also predestines the *means* to those ends. Thus, He ordains that His people shall have certain blessings, but He also ordains that they shall ask for those blessings. And how many are living witnesses that God's ear is not heavy that it cannot hear ! If all the printing-presses in the world were at work for the next thousand years printing only answers to prayer, not half would be done ! Oh ! that every answer that God ever gave to prayer had been written down, and graven with an iron pen, and lead in the rock for ever ! Oh ! that answers to prayer were printed on the sky, that infidels might blush, and turn, and live ! O praying soul, as sure as there is a God in heaven, your prayers are heard and shall be answered ! You may be dead and gone, a hundred summers may have smiled over your grave ; your very tombstone may have worn away through age, but the prayer of faith shall pierce the sky, and bring showers of blessings down, because God has promised to hear prayer, and He is faithful to His promise. And more, when a man really gets answers to his prayer, never think lightly of his religion.

Perhaps some Christian reads these lines who is sorely tried with manifold troubles. Earthly cares ! how heavily they drag down the soul. You are wearied and distracted. You inwardly sigh : How can I make both ends meet ? How can I provide for my children?—and perhaps too those children are unsaved. Let me remind you of what Hezekiah did, when Sennacherib wrote his insolent and blasphemous

letter. "Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord." He referred the matter altogether to God, spread the whole case before Him, and sent the letter to the King of Kings. So do you. "Commit," or, as it literally is, "*Roll thy way upon the Lord,*" the burden of care and trouble which is too heavy for you to lift, much less to carry, do you *roll* on Him in prayer, "and He shall bring it to pass"—that is, He will do it, He will do for you what you cannot do for yourself (Ps. xxxvii. 5).

Or perhaps you are tried with doubts and fears about the salvation of your soul. O, then remember the faithful promises of your faithful God—"As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even for ever" (Ps. cxxv. 2). "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me : and I give unto them eternal life ; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John x. 27, 28). And ever remember the very faithfulness of God in fulfilling His promises is in itself an argument for prayer, therefore let your daily, your hourly petition be, "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe."

The children of grace all feel their own sinfulness and helplessness, and therefore the faithfulness of their God is the joy of their heart. And so, on the one hand, they feel their own exceeding need, and, on the other, experience the sweetness of the Lord's love in giving them exceeding great and precious promises, and thus are able to say—

Dear Saviour, I have nought to plead  
On earth below or heaven above,  
But just my own exceeding need,  
And Thine exceeding love.

The need will soon be past and gone,  
Exceeding great but quickly o'er ;  
The love unbought is all Thy own,  
And lasts for evermore.

II. And, indeed, the faithfulness of our God is an encouragement to earnest work for Him. For what is His promise concerning the teaching and preaching of His Own Word? “As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater : *So shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth : it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it*” (Isa. lv. 10, 11). Now if, we are really teaching the simple Word of God, we cannot labour in vain. The work of the artist, or sculptor, or statesman may fail; ours cannot, because the faithfulness of God ensures success. Only let us speak *all* His Words, and then we never know what He may do by us. Let me give you one instance of the Lord’s fulfilling the gracious promise I have just referred to. It shall be from the life, of the late Stephen Butler of Southampton, the savour of whose saintly character and earnest Evangelical preaching still lingers and is remembered there. Before his wife died it appears she desired him to preach her Funeral Sermon

from the words—"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out" (Rev. iii. 12). The Sermon was afterwards printed, it fell into a certain lady's hands, and so mightily did the Spirit of God work in her heart by means of it that she first gave herself to Christ (2 Cor. viii. 5), and then all she had to found a Home for destitute girls, which she still carries on at Southsea. See, then, the results from one Gospel Sermon !

Dear brethren in Christ, we who labour for Him are often discouraged because of the way, and the reason is we do not sufficiently lean on the faithfulness of our God. We may not *see* the results from one tenth of our work, but our duty and privilege is to toil in *faith*, trusting simply to the Lord's Own promise. Oh ! it is a glorious thing to live for Christ, and to *speak for Him*, telling others what God's sovereign grace has done for our souls, and how we have been called out of darkness into marvellous light. Let us make Bengel's motto our own :

Jesus in heaven,  
Jesus in the heart,  
Heaven in the heart,  
The heart in Heaven.

And then, out of a heart filled with Jesus and Heaven, we shall speak living, loving words, and the Holy Spirit will bless them, and we shall find the promise of our God faithful and true.

## XII.

### THE ETHIOPIAN TREASURER: THE REJOICING CHRISTIAN.

ACTS viii. 39.

And he went on his way rejoicing.

IF you look at the early part of this chapter you will see that Philip the Evangelist had been to Samaria preaching the Gospel, and we are told of the wonderful things that were done by the power of the Holy Ghost. “There was great joy in that city” because souls were saved. And we find that afterwards he returned to Jerusalem, and waited to know where God would lead him next. But as good Dr. Hawker used to say: Those who watch Providence always find Providence watching them, so an angel of the Lord soon makes his path plain. “Arise,” said he, “and go down towards the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.” Now, if Philip had not been a man of faith, he might have said, Why should I go and bury myself in a desert? Let me go into a town and preach the Gospel, but do not send me into the wilderness. “He arose and went”—he was willing to go just where God sent him. But why was he sent into that desert? It was on purpose to meet a particular man. The man held a high position in this world, and

he was an earnest seeker after God too. He lived in Ethiopia, and had come all across the desert, that he might worship in the Temple at Jesusalem. There he had been, and had joined in the grand ritual (and the Jewish ritual was grand because it was of God's appointing): but with all the music and beauty he had found no Jesus there; and he was going back as he came, a child of wrath. He was sitting in his chariot, reading his Bible. Indeed, he was reading it aloud, perhaps in order that his servants might hear him, though I have been told by those who have lived in India that it is a common thing to read aloud while driving. The Evangelist joins the chariot, and hears him reading Isaiah liii., and preached unto him Jesus. Philip knew that none but Jesus can do helpless sinners good. The man believes and goes on his way rejoicing. This is indeed a story of grace—it teaches us what the Gospel, applied by the Spirit of God, can do. I often think it will be one of the sweetest joys of heaven to relate how we were called of God. Next to his Bible, there is no book so attractive to a child of God as the book of his own life. He delights to remember the way the Lord has led him these years in the wilderness, while he is able to testify of his Heavenly Father's loving-kindness and tender mercies.

But now, to come back to this blessed story of grace. I always like to note well the accounts of conversions which we find in the New Testament. I am sure they are very profitable to us. Now, here is a man going through the desert in his carriage, and another man meets him and teaches him about Christ. He receives the message,

and goes on his way rejoicing. How is this? I make bold to say—It is the Providence, the ordination of God.

A friend of mine told me a very interesting story on this very subject the other day. I will repeat it to you as well as I can from memory. Some time ago a certain minister was visiting an old man who was very ill. As soon as he went into the room the old man said, "I am a very strong believer in God's Providence." "Yes," replied the clergyman, encouragingly, and he continued, "Do you see that chest of drawers?" "I do." Pointing to one of the drawers, he said, "Will you open that?" He did so. "What do you see there?" "An envelope." On opening the envelope he found a flaxen curl off a child's head. "Now," said the old man, "I'll tell you the history of that curl. My father was a woodman, and when I was a little boy I used to go with him and pick up the pieces of wood that were scattered about as he felled the trees. One day I stooped to pick up some chips, just as the axe was coming down upon the block. My father did not see me till too late to prevent the axe falling, and down it came! He thought he had killed me, and fainted away. My screams brought him to himself. He looked at the block. There was no blood, but there was a little flaxen curl lying on the ground close by. He picked it up, and said, 'Come, my child, we will go home.' We went home together, and he told my mother all that had happened. 'No more work to-day,' he said, 'let us spend the rest of the day in

praising God for His goodness, and we will keep the curl in remembrance of His Providence in having preserved my child from death.”

Here, too, in this eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we have Providence at work—and when we see these two men meeting, and the momentous issues hanging on that short intercourse—we *must* say, This is the finger of God!

Now let us confine ourselves to a few simple thoughts about our text. The believer in Christ *ought* to rejoice. This world of sin and sorrow is not his home. He is a traveller, ever going onward and upward, and heavenward and homeward. He passes through the wilderness leaning on his Beloved, and soon he will see the King in His beauty, and the golden gates of glory will open to welcome him when the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

Yet he is often depressed. Then he says, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God.” In the 43rd Psalm we have a picture of the Christian’s life. In the second verse he asks, “Why go I *mourning* because of the oppression of the enemy?” while in the fourth verse he says, “Then will I go. . . . God my *exceeding joy*: Yea, upon the harp will I praise Thee, O God, my God.” O depressed believer, “Lift up your heart.” Happy if you can add—“Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul” (Psalm xxv. 1). On the one hand, the believer is obliged to mourn over the oppression of the enemy, sin within, Satan without, and yet is by grace

enabled to call God his "exceeding joy." To take another illustration. After a certain calamity "David was greatly distressed, for the people spake of stoning him." What, then, did he do? Sit down and cry in despair? Not so. "The people spake of stoning him . . . BUT"—Oh! what volumes there are in that little word "but"—"But *David encouraged himself in the Lord his God*" (1 Sam. xxx. 6). Let me give you four plain reasons why God's children should rejoice.

I. They should rejoice because their names are written in Heaven. When "the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name," Christ replied, "Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you; but *rather rejoice, because your names are written in Heaven*" (Luke x. 17–20). And there is a very solemn verse upon this subject, I think it is the most awful verse in the whole Bible: "Whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life, was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. xx. 15). What a fearful thought that brings to our minds—that unless our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life we cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Oh! will you not ask: Is my name written there? For then a sweet voice answers, Come and see. There is another "whosoever," and one very full of comfort—"God so"—and who can fathom the depth of that "so?"—"loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life!" So that if you do but flee to Jesus only as poor, lost, ruined sinners, and trust in

Him alone, you may be quite sure your names are written in Heaven, and you should rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. You know what St. Paul says in Philippians iv. 3, 4. Speaking of some of his fellow-labourers, he says, "Whose names are in the Book of Life." And what comes next? "*Rejoice* in the Lord alway : and again I say *Rejoice*." Should they not rejoice, for who can tear a leaf or blot a name out of the Book of Life?

II. They should rejoice because God has promised to supply all their need. Do you not sometimes look into the future and fear that many trials and troubles will come upon you? Newton says our trials are like a bundle of faggots, and God gives us one at a time to carry. How foolish to try to carry the whole bundle at once ! Can you not look back on your past lives and see that the trials you most dreaded generally never came? And so we try to peer into the future, and say, How shall I bear this great trial? Now, God will not give us grace to meet troubles beforehand. He gave the children of Israel manna day by day, and that is how He does with His children now. Trials we shall have, but who can tell how many mercies along with them? Special grace will be given you for each particular hour of trouble, and when you come to die, God will give you grace for a dying hour ; and so full of grace will your soul then be that you will feel, as many have felt and said, Is this Death ?

Day by day the manna fell,  
Oh, to learn this lesson well.

And so we are taught in Phil. iv. 19, My God *shall* (there is the certainty of it) supply (that is, fill up) all (not some of) your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Oh! happy, happy souls, that have such a portion ! And if you could ask Christians over the whole world, they would all tell you the same thing—not one thing has failed of all that God promised—He has supplied *all* our need.

III. They should rejoice because the Lord will complete His work of grace in their hearts. How many hindrances there are to those who walk in the narrow way ! How many things to damp the spiritual life of the Christian, and yet he holds on his way ! Bunyan wonderfully illustrates this in the “Pilgrim’s Progress.” “The Interpreter took Christian by the hand, and led him into a place where was a fire burning against a wall, and one standing by it, always casting much water upon it, to quench it ; yet did the fire burn higher and hotter. Then said Christian, ‘What means this ?’ The Interpreter answered, ‘This fire is the work of grace that is wrought in the heart ; he that casts water upon it, to extinguish and put it out, is the Devil ; but in that thou seest the fire notwithstanding burn higher and hotter, thou shalt also see the reason of that.’ So he had him about to the other side of the wall, where he saw a man with a vessel of oil in his hand, of the which he did also continually cast, but secretly, into the fire. Then said Christian, ‘What means this ?’ The Interpreter answered, ‘This is Christ, Who

continually, with the oil of His grace, maintains the work already begun in the heart: by the means of which, notwithstanding what the Devil can do, the souls of His people prove gracious still' (2 Cor. xii. 9). And in that thou sawest that the man stood behind the wall to maintain the fire, that is to teach thee that it is hard for the tempted to see how this work of grace is maintained in the soul." The world, the flesh, and the devil all try to quench the Divine life, but Jesus preserves it by His Spirit, and so completes the work of His grace.

IV. They should rejoice because Jesus is praying for them in Heaven. Read St. John xvii., which has been called the Lord's Prayer, and may not we take that chapter as a pattern of His pleading above? Or, recollect His words to St. Peter—"Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you (*all*, plural) as wheat: but I have prayed for *thee* (singular, *individually*) that thy faith fail not." The dear Saviour's prayer was answered. Peter's faith did falter, but it did not fail. The very temptation which Satan intended for his ruin worked his good. It blew away the chaff of self-sufficiency, but the wheat of Divine grace remained. Do you feel sometimes you cannot pray?—that even if you use well-known words, yet still your heart does not seem to go with them? You say, "I would, but cannot pray." At such dark times it is blessed, indeed, to look upward, and to remember there is One before the altar in Heaven, who is ever interceding for you. He prays for us within the veil even when we cannot pray for ourselves, and

He is safe and must succeed,  
For whom the Lord vouchsafes to plead.

Think of these four inestimable blessings which belong  
to all God's children, and count up the sweet mercies  
which come unasked each returning day, and then try,  
like the Ethiopian eunuch, to go on your way rejoicing.

## XIII.

### LEANING ON JESUS.

ST. JOHN xiii. 23.

There was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.

CHRYSOSTOM said he wished he had seen three things—Christ in the flesh, the Temple in its glory, and St. Paul preaching. If we were asked to record our wish, perhaps we should say, Oh, that I had leaned, like St. John, on the bosom of the dear Redeemer ! The breast of Jesus is the safest, the happiest, the calmest, the most peaceful place in all the world.

Note that word *leaning*. It is not the strong who lean upon the weak, it is the weak who lean upon the strong. And where is the child of God who has not learned his own weakness? He battles, it may be, with some fierce temptation in his own strength, and falls again and again. That teaches him to flee to Jesus for succour, and to lean upon Him, then he becomes strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Let me tell you four simple things concerning this blissful place, the bosom of Jesus.

I. IT IS THE PLACE OF INSTRUCTION.—St. John was near his Master, and so he heard His words—all His

words. His ear was close to His mouth. His attitude was this, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." There are millions of souls who are utterly careless about hearing Christ's words, and yet the words which He has spoken, the same will judge them at the Last Day. Others, too, are unwilling to be taught by Christ. They take up the Gospels after having made up their minds as to what they ought to teach. They do not say, What is the Master's message to me? but they quibble and cavil, and when they meet with things above their reason they turn away, saying, This is a hard saying, who can hear it? So it was eighteen hundred years ago. The Saviour said, for example, "No man can come unto Me except it were given unto him of My Father" (St. John vi. 65). That is, no man can come to Me without the special grace of God. But men said then as they think now, "I can come when I choose," and they were offended at Christ's words, so in the verse following we read, "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." Dear brethren, may the Lord give us a quiet, childlike spirit, so that we may be willing to be taught by Jesus, and continually pray, What I know not, teach Thou me. It is true Christ is not here on earth to teach, but by His Spirit He still guides His people into all truth.

St. John leaned on Christ, and he is called the Apostle of love. He caught the spirit of the Master. The love of Christ was shed abroad in his heart. And so it will be with us. If we, by faith, *now* get near Him, we, too, shall have love for the souls of men, we shall be willing

to labour, and watch, and pray for—ay, and weep over dying souls ! We shall feel—

A thousand sorrows pierce my soul,  
To think that all are not thine own !

II. THE BOSOM OF JESUS IS THE PLACE OF FRIENDSHIP.—Abraham was the friend of God, and John was the friend of Jesus. You have doubtless noticed John never calls himself by his own name, but always “the Disciple whom Jesus loved.” No doubt the Lord loved each of the eleven Apostles, but, I suppose, John more especially. He belonged to the innermost circle of His friends. Dear brethren, have you a Friend above? You will need Him some day. You may be healthy and happy now, but the dark clouds will be sure to come, and your heart will be filled with unspeakable bitterness. You will be brought to a standstill. You will not know which way to go, or which turn to take. You will have to confess, I know not what to do. Your sorrow will lie too deep for human aid. *Then*, in that hour of wretchedness and loneliness, you will need a friend. Oh, seek the sinner’s Friend *now*, and then, in the hour of your distress, He will arise and save you.

III. THE BOSOM OF JESUS IS THE PLACE OF SAFETY.—Those who are hidden there cannot perish ; they are “Safe in the arms of Jesus.” We would sooner believe the stars could fall from Heaven than that souls once in Christ’s arms could be snatched out by Satan. He keeps those who lean on Him as a hen gathers her chickens under her wing. “Neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.” “No man is able to pluck them out of

My Father's hand," the Saviour says, and His word cannot be broken.

IV. THE BOSOM OF JESUS IS THE PLACE OF SWEET MANIFESTATION.—He manifests Himself to those who lean on Him, as He does not to the world. For "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man (that is, of the *unconverted* man), the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit" (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10). And such sweet things does Jesus tell His people now that Heaven begins below.

On what are you leaning? Is it on the world? Alas! the world ruined Achan, and Haman, and Demas, and it will ruin your soul if you trust in it. Besides, it will leave you when you need it most. Rank, beauty, money, what can they do in a dying hour? The world will do very well in the London season, but it will not do in the hour of death and the Day of Judgment. Do you lean on sacraments? They are signs, not the substance—emblems truly of a Saviour's love, but not the Saviour Himself. Do you lean on your own good works? Why do so when the Bible tells you Salvation is not of works? I say, tenderly and earnestly, lean on Christ. Bring all your cares and all your sins to Him—the burden is too great for you. Lean *only* on Christ. Lean *continually* on Christ. Some years ago a female teacher in Persia writing to a friend said, that on a certain Sunday afternoon she was seated on a mat in the middle of the earthen floor of the church. She felt like George Whitefield felt when he said, "Lord, I am weary

*in Thy work, but not of it.*" As she was thus resting on the mat a woman came and seated herself directly behind, and begged her to lean back. At first she declined, then she drew her back, saying, "If you love me, lean hard." So the great Master says to you this day, "*If you love Me, lean hard.*" "Lean hard," you cannot lean too hard. He will not repel you, or cast you out, or cast you off. We have heard of a story in Roman History how that, when the Senate was assembled, a little bird pursued by a hawk fled for refuge to the breast of one of the senators. But he, being a stern man, snatched it thence, and threw it on the ground. Thereupon the senators expelled him from their body on account of his unkindly disposition. But think not that Jesus will cast thus away any that flee to Him. He will receive them graciously, and love them freely, and they will walk in the heavenward path leaning on their Beloved. O happy life—if life is leaning on Christ's arm! O glad-some death—if death is sleeping on Christ's breast! May the Lord enable us to say *now*—

Both my arms are clasp'd around Him,  
And my head is on His breast;  
For this weary soul hath found Him  
Such a perfect, perfect rest.

## XIV.

### SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES.

ST. JOHN v. 39.

Search the Scriptures, for . . . they are they which testify of Me.

WE have read that Queen Victoria, when presenting a Bible to the Ambassador of an African Prince, said, THIS IS THE SECRET OF ENGLAND'S GREATNESS. Those were true and noble words. We should be very thankful that "The Word of God is not bound" (2 Tim. ii. 9), and we have a cheap Bible. It is no longer chained to the desk, but every man may read and possess it if he will. The first English Translation of the Bible was made by Wycliffe in the year 1380. Before that time a Bible cost £300! Our present translation was commenced in 1607, and finished in 1611: and Dr. Newman was right when he said that the great secret of Protestant strength in this country was the earnestness with which Protestant Christians clung to their Saxon Bible.

I. What a solemn *responsibility* is a cheap Bible! For to hear, yet not to heed, the words of the Holy Book, will but increase the sinner's condemnation at the last. God said to Joshua, "This Book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night;" and if we turn to the first Psalm we shall find that the man whom God pronounces "blessed," had

“his delight in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” How many of us could say like David, “O, how I love Thy law ! it is my meditation all the day.” How few there are in our congregations who imitate the noble example of the Bereans who “*received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily.*” Well might our Lord warn, “Take heed what ye hear.” Our plain duty is to test what we hear by God’s Word, and to believe only what is therein contained.

II. But there is one thing we must mark well. The Bible is not a book of History or Geography which can be understood by any one who takes pains to study it. No one can understand the Bible unless taught by the Holy Ghost. And if the same Spirit who caused holy men of old to write it enlightens the mind, then the most ignorant man in earthly matters at once receives its humbling truths and becomes wise unto Salvation : but if not, however talented and educated the reader may be, to that man the Bible is a sealed book, and its real contents are “foolishness” (1 Cor. ii. 14). I said, “humbling truths”—and humbling without doubt the doctrines of the Bible are. For it tells every human being that out of his heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies (Matt. xv. 19). Now, when any thinking man hears this, his spirit at once rises against the Book which dare tell him such things, he goes away in a rage, and says that in preaching such doctrine we libel human nature. I am sure we do not. We only speak words of truth and soberness. For I am convinced that every man’s heart

by nature is equally prone to evil—that the seeds of *all* evil are in it—and it only depends upon circumstances whether those roots of bitterness grow slowly or quickly. But how different is it when the Holy Spirit teaches! He then acknowledges himself "*vile*." He feels himself the "*chief of sinners*," and wonders at God's forbearance and long-suffering in so long waiting to be gracious. Happy he who searches the Scriptures and finds therein a picture of himself. It is at least a token for good if we see a man a diligent reader of his Bible.

III. Have a stated time for reading the Scripture privately. What is left to be done at any time is generally never done at all. Especially, read a portion with your family each day. If your children do not see you do it, it is not very likely they will ever become Bible-readers. It may be, some of you never perform this sacred duty. Let me beseech you to put it off no longer. When you have done wrong, how can you best repair it? Why, in confessing, surely, that you have erred. Then do so at once, and take down the old Book, and remember to pray for yourself and your children that God's Holy Spirit may open your eyes, to behold the wondrous things in His Law.

Always look at the marginal readings—and find out the verses referred to. They often cast a great deal of light on the text. If you want a commentary for Family reading buy Matthew Henry or Scott; they were both men taught of God, and the expositions of the former are homely and forcible, and Scott is exceedingly well-suited for reading aloud.

IV. But never forget the grand theme of all the Scriptures is Christ. "They testify of *Me*." He is the One of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus how He said, "All things must be fulfilled which were written in the LAW OF MOSES, and in the PROPHETS, and in the PSALMS, concerning *Me*."

## XV.

### THE BLOOD.

I ST. JOHN i. 7.

The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

**I**N a certain Magazine there lately appeared an Article headed : Is Life Worth Living? I can answer that question as regards myself: life is, indeed, worth living to me, if only I may preach to others the " precious blood of Christ."

Our text divides itself into two parts : Man's sin, God's remedy. Now, sin is the monster evil, the great hemlock-tree which has spread out its branches wide as the earth. I wonder whether you have ever thought about a very difficult question. Look around the world, and you see sickness, suffering, an ever-increasing sum of human Misery, and all this the result of sin. Did you ever think where *sin* came from? who made it? Of one thing we may be quite sure—God did not. As we see the tares springing up on all sides we must say, An enemy hath done this. God permitted it. Do you still ask—Why? I will tell you a true story which will teach you all you can know on this mysterious subject.

Some time ago, after the conclusion of one of Mr. Brownlow North's Addresses in Edinburgh, a young man came into the room where he was receiving persons

unxious for private conversation, and said to him, "I have heard you preach three times, sir, and I neither care for you nor your preaching, unless you can tell me, Why did God permit sin?"

"I will do that with pleasure," was the immediate reply ; "because *He chose it.*"

The young man, apparently taken by surprise, stood speechless ; and Mr. North again repeated, "*Because He chose it;* and," added he, "if you continue to question and cavil at God's dealings, and, vainly puffed up by your carnal mind, strive to be wise above what is written, I will tell you something more that God will do ; *He will some day put you into hell.* It is vain for you to strive with your Maker—you cannot resist Him ; and neither your opinion of His dealings, nor your blasphemous expression of them, will in the least lessen the pain of your everlasting damnation, which, I again tell you, will most certainly be your portion, if you go on in your present spirit. There were such questioners as you in St. Paul's time, and how did the Apostle answer them ? '*Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?*'"

The young man here interrupted Mr. North, and said, "Is there such a text as that in the Bible?" "Yes, there is," was the reply, "in the ninth chapter of the Romans ; and I recommend you to go home and read that chapter, and after you have read it, and seen there how God claims for Himself the right to do *whatever He chooses*, without permitting 'the thing formed to say to Him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?—remember,—that besides permitting sin, there is another thing *God has*

*chosen to do—God chose to send Jesus.* Of His own free and sovereign grace, God gave His only-begotten Son to die for sinners, in their stead, in their place; so that, though they are sinners, and have done things worthy of death, not one of them shall ever be cast into hell for his sins who will accept Jesus as his only Saviour, and believe in Him, and rest in His word. I have no time to say more to you now. Do attend to what I have told you, and may God the Holy Spirit bless it for Jesus Christ's sake."

This conversation took place on Sunday evening. On the following Friday Mr. North was sitting in a friend's drawing-room (the Rev. Moody Stuart's), when the servant announced that a young man wanted to speak to him. On being shown upstairs, he said, "Do you remember me?" "No." "Do you not remember the young man who on Sunday night asked you to tell him, 'Why did God permit sin ?'" "Yes, perfectly." "Well, sir, I am that young man, and you said, that God permitted sin because *He chose it*, and you told me to go home and read the ninth chapter of the Romans; and also that *God chose to send Jesus* to die for such sinners as I am; and I did, sir, what you told me, and afterwards I fell down at God's feet, and asked Him to forgive my sins, because Jesus died for me, and to give me His Holy Spirit to put all wicked thoughts out of my head, and He did, and now I am happy—oh, so, so happy, sir; and though the Devil still comes sometimes to tempt me with my old thoughts, and to ask me what reason I have to think God has forgiven me, I have

always managed to get him away, by telling him that I do not want to judge things by my own *reason*, but by *God's Word*, and that the only reason why I know I am forgiven, is that *for Christ's sake, God chooses to pardon me.*"

The changed expression of the young man's countenance was quite sufficient to account for Mr. North's not knowing him again. It was radiant with joy and peace.

Sin is like a cheque. It may have a long circulation or it may have a short circulation, but it is pretty sure to come back to the bank on which it is drawn. So you will reap what you have sown. *Unless your sins are forgiven*, you will feel their sting in this world probably, and for certain in the world to come, with bitter interest.

No doubt you have committed many sins that you have altogether forgotten. But remember, it is one thing for you to have forgotten them, but quite another for them to be washed away in the fountain open for sin and all uncleanness !

But, thank God, He has provided a remedy for sin in the blood of His Own Son. That blood is like a scarlet cord running through the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. We are told Abel killed a lamb and offered him for a burnt-offering to God. Why did he do it? It does not say so in the Bible, but we may be pretty sure God commanded him. And as he beheld the flowing blood of the lamb no doubt he looked forward to His coming who should offer Himself to God as a sweet-smelling sacrifice. That little Book of Martyrs, the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, tells us he did it "by

faith." If you read the history of Cain you will see he was a rejecter of the Blood. He would not acknowledge himself a guilty sinner deserving death, and so he went into his garden and gathered flowers and fruit, and offered them to God. But the Lord had no respect to Cain or to his offering. Take another illustration. At the time of the Passover the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel were to kill a lamb, and sprinkle the blood on the two side-posts, and on the upper door-post of their houses. Thus protected, when the destroying angel came, would they be safe? Yes, truly, for "*when I see the blood, I will pass over you.*" Inside those blood-sprinkled houses there was perfect peace and security, the inmates feasting on the lamb. Outside, there was death and destruction. Had the destroying angel entered, he would have had to pass *through* the blood, and that he could not do. But note, the blood was to be sprinkled. So the blood of Jesus must be *applied* by the Holy Spirit to our souls, or it will not benefit or save us.

This Blood *cleanseth*. It is the present tense. It has cleansed millions of every condition and character, and rank and clime. Old men and maidens, young men and little children, have been sprinkled with this precious Blood, and lost each guilty stain.

It cleanses from *all* sin. I do not know what your sins may have been, but I am quite sure the Blood of Jesus can make you pure as though you had never sinned. And when God forgives He forgets. Man often says, I will forgive, but I cannot forget. But the Lord

says of His people, "Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more." And the believer in Jesus who is accepted in Him and washed in His Blood, needs a cleansing from his daily sins. As he walks through this sinful world his *feet* are soiled, and he must repair each night to the open fountain. "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his *feet*, but is clean, every whit" (St. John xiii. 10).

Let our Lord's most solemn words sink down in your hearts—"If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." Every word is weighty. "If *I* wash thee not," no one can wash us but Christ; "If *I wash* thee not," He must wash us, it is not enough to set us an example; "If *I wash thee* not," how personal it is, unless *your own* sins are washed away you must perish—"thou hast no part with *Me*."

A visitor \* among the poor was one day climbing the broken staircase which led to a garret in one of the worst parts of London, when his attention was arrested by a man of peculiarly ferocious and repulsive countenance, who stood upon the landing-place, leaning with folded arms against the wall. There was something about the man's appearance which made the visitor shudder, and his first impulse was to go back. He made an effort, however, to get into conversation with him, and told him that he came there with the desire to do him good and to see him happy, and that the book he held in his hand contained the secret of all happiness. The ruffian shook him off as if he had been a viper, and bade

\* This beautiful story is taken from a Tract by Rev. F. Morse.

him begone with his nonsense, or he would kick him downstairs. While the visitor was endeavouring with gentleness and patience to argue the point with him, he was startled by hearing a feeble voice, which appeared to come from behind one of the broken doors that opened upon the landing, saying, "Does your book tell of the Blood which cleanseth from all sin?" For the moment the visitor was too absorbed in the case of the hardened sinner before him to answer the inquiry, and it was repeated in urgent and thrilling tones, "Tell me, oh, tell me, does your book tell of the Blood which cleanseth from all sin?"

The visitor pushed open the door and entered the room. It was a wretched place, wholly destitute of furniture except a three-legged stool, and a bundle of straw in a corner, upon which were stretched the wasted limbs of an aged woman. When the visitor entered she raised herself upon one elbow, fixed her eyes eagerly upon him, and repeated her former question, "Does your book tell of the Blood which cleanseth from all sin?" He sat down upon the stool beside her, and inquired, "My poor friend, what do you want to know of the Blood that cleanseth from all sin?" There was something fearful in the energy of her voice and manner as she replied, "What do I want to know of it! Man, I am dying; I am going to stand naked before God. I have been a wicked woman, a very wicked woman, all my life. I shall have to answer for everything I have done;" and she groaned bitterly as the thought of a lifetime's iniquity seemed to cross her soul. "But once," she continued,

"once, years ago, I came by the door of a church, and I went in ; I don't know what for ; I was soon out again ; but one word I heard there I have never forgot. It was something about Blood which cleanseth from all sin. Oh, if I could hear of it now ! Tell me, tell me, if there is anything about that Blood in your book !" The visitor answered by opening his Bible and reading the 1st chapter of the First Epistle of St. John. The poor creature seemed to devour the words, and when he paused, she exclaimed, "Read more, read more." He read the 2nd chapter—a slight noise made him look round—the savage ruffian had followed him into his mother's room, and though his face was partly turned away, the visitor could perceive tears rolling down his cheeks. The visitor read the 3rd, 4th, and 5th chapters, before he could get his poor listener to consent that he should stop, and then she would not let him go till he promised to come the next day. He never from that time missed a day reading to her until she died six weeks afterwards, and very blessed was it to see how, almost from the first, she seemed to find peace by believing in Jesus. Every day the son followed the visitor into his mother's room, and listened in silence, but not in indifference. On the day of her funeral he beckoned him to one side as they were filling up the grave, and said, "Sir, I have been thinking that there is nothing I should so much like as to spend the rest of my life in telling others of the Blood which cleanseth from all sin."

My brethren, do you wish to join the company of the redeemed in the bright mansions of eternity ? Then you

must be washed—washed in the precious Blood of God's own Son, or you can never enter the gates of glory. Wash, then, and be clean.

There is the multitude of the redeemed. They have come out of every kindred, and people, and tongue. A crown of gold is on every brow, a palm in every hand. The angels wonder, and ask, Who are these, and these, and these? Then a voice out of the Throne says, These are My elect, these are My redeemed, who have washed their robes in the Blood of the Lamb. “ THEREFORE are they before the Throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His Temple.”

## XVI.

### ASSURANCE.

2 TIM. i. 12.

I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.

THE man who wrote these words was sure of his own salvation. Having committed himself to One able to keep him, he was confident all would be well.

But who did write them? It was "Paul the aged," in his lonely prison at Rome. The Second Epistle to Timothy was the last letter he ever wrote, for the time of his departure was at hand, and he was daily expecting martyrdom. Still, the almost friendless man (for only Luke was with him) was neither ashamed to live nor afraid to die. Amidst the darkness around, there were rents in the clouds above, and he had glimpses of the glory which was so soon to burst upon him, while he knew Whom he had trusted, and felt confident that He would deliver him from every evil work, and would preserve him unto His heavenly kingdom.

Dear brethren, it is a blessed thing to be sure of one's salvation. It was this assurance that made the martyrs of olden time clap their hands in the flames, and lie down on hot burning coals as upon beds of roses.

I. May all persons who, by God's grace, have given themselves to the Saviour, use the language of the Apostle and say, I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day. It has been said that St. Paul knew that he himself would be saved, because God had specially revealed it to him, and that a like assurance is not to be enjoyed by ordinary believers. But note what he says in 2 Cor. v. 1, "For *we* know (not *I* know, but *we*) that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Listen to what he says to the Thessalonians, first Epistle, first chapter, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, *and in much assurance.*" Hear also what St. John says (1 John iii. 14), "*We know* that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Also in the fifth chapter, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; *that ye may know that ye have eternal life.*" Now if, as some tell us, we cannot be sure whether we are saved or not till the Day of Judgment, what means the exhortation in 2 Peter i. 10, "Give diligence to make your calling and election *sure?*" The words of the Blessed Saviour Himself set the question beyond all doubt, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My Word and believeth on Him that sent Me, *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but *is passed from death unto life*" (St.

John v. 24). Now, dear brethren, seek to use St. Paul's words. When you can do so truthfully and with child-like faith, you will have a Heaven within you, as well as a Heaven before you. You will have a Paradise below, and when the glass of life is running out, and your own sun setting, you will go peacefully down the valley of the shadow of death, saying, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.

II. But I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that many of God's people have never enjoyed this happy assurance of their soul's safety. For example, if you had gone to Olney, in Buckinghamshire, a hundred years ago, you would have found one of the best of Christians, Cowper, the poet, who had fled for refuge to Jesus only for salvation, but with no assurance whatever of his soul's safety. He had "fightings without and fears within." In his case we clearly see how possible it is to have faith, yet no assurance. But we may well inquire as to why there are so many Christians who cannot honestly use St. Paul's words—I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day?

Let me suggest four reasons.

First of all, it may be, grace is weak in their souls. They are not strong in the Lord. God's work within them is like "smoking flax." A little candle gives but little light, and so little grace gives but little assurance.

Or, they may be too much taken up with the things of the world. It is very hard for a worldly Christian to get to Heaven. Mark what is said of the father of the

faithful—"Abram was very rich," or as it is in the Hebrew, was *very heavy*, "in cattle, in silver, and in gold" (Gen. xiii. 2). The love of money is a great hindrance to the heavenward journey. "Woe to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!"

Or, this lack of assurance may arise from the blessings of the Gospel not being perfectly understood. "He that believeth in Me," said our Saviour, "*hath* everlasting life."—He "*hath* saved us, and called us with an holy calling," echoes St. Paul. "The blood of Jesus Christ *cleanseth* us from *all sin*," says St. John. Now, may not a man lack assurance simply because he does not *thoroughly grasp* these simple yet most blessed truths?

Or, it may be, he indulges in known sin, such as untruthfulness, a lack of uprightness in his dealings with his fellow men, or some secret iniquity worse than all. This steals away his comfort, and makes him wretched at heart. If he could only by God's grace break away from the sin that does so easily beset him, he would soon be able to make sure of a mansion in the skies.

III. On what ground may we arrive at such a persuasion as that of the apostle?

Some good people look into their own hearts for marks of grace, and if they see them, they are well-contented and feel a certain assurance of their state before God: if, however, at any time they fail to discern them they are utterly cast down. Now contrition for sin, condemnation and renunciation of self, a longing for Christ, and love for His people, these things are most precious, because outward tokens of the grace of God within. Yet

as frames and feelings change, they cannot be the means of giving a continual and well-grounded assurance.

Oh ! say some, If I only had a vision that I was one of God's elect, then I should be sure of salvation, and my doubts and fears would be ended ! Alas ! if your assurance rested on a vision, Satan would soon persuade you it was all a delusion and that you had never seen it !

My brethren, if you desire to make your own salvation sure, you must trust simply in *God's written Word*. Bunyan puts it well in the "Pilgrim's Progress." Christian and Hopeful had been four weary days in the dungeon, but at last Christian says, "I have a key in my bosom, called Promise,\* that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle." The wonderful key was successful, the prison doors were opened, and they escaped out of Giant Despair's hands. Let me explain to you what I mean. Take that most simple and yet most comfortable of all the "exceeding great and precious promises" in the Bible (St. John vi. 37), "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me, and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." You ask, How am I to know whether I am among God's people? The first part of the text answers your query, "All that the Father giveth Me (that is, all Christ's sheep), shall *come* to Me." Note that word "*come*." It is the distinguishing mark of the Lord's children that they *come* to Christ.

\* Of course it is not in the power of the *words themselves* to bring peace and salvation. They do this only when received in faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. What worth is there in the *printed book* to the millions who hear it or read it? Therefore Bunyan's wonderful key was—a *Promise of God applied by the Holy Ghost*.

*Assurance.*

Just as I was I came to Thee,  
An heir of guilt and misery,

is the experience of them all. And *just as they are* Christ receives them, for the other part of the text says, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." Therefore I may argue thus, If I have *come* to Christ, I must be among His people, otherwise I should have never come. So this text becomes a precious possession to me. I can call it mine. I can put my finger upon it, and trust my whole salvation there. And God's *Promise* being the ground of my assurance, even Satan cannot rob me of my peace, for Heaven and earth may pass away but Christ's words can never pass away!

Engrav'd as in eternal brass,  
The mighty Promise shines,  
Nor can the powers of darkness rase  
Those everlasting lines.

O man, O woman, thou hast a soul! What wilt thou do with it? Wilt thou try to keep it thyself? If thou doest so, it will be lost for ever. Take my advice this day. Give it to the Lord Jesus. Say, O Christ, I commit my soul to Thee. I cannot save or keep myself. Wash me in Thy Blood, clothe me in Thy righteousness, sanctify me with Thy Spirit, and at last let me see Thy face in peace. Millions have given themselves to Him, and not one has been lost. "Safe in the Arms of Jesus" they have remained, in life, in death, and in eternity. Oh! take my advice this day and give yourselves to Christ. *And yet I know full well you will not do this unless*

*God's Holy Spirit so incline your heart.* How earnestly I pray He may do so now !

I do not know a better illustration of my meaning than may be found in the Life of the celebrated John Newton. While yet a youth, he had a dream which deeply impressed him, and I cannot do better than detail it to you in his own words :—“ The scene, presented to my imagination, was the harbour of Venice, where we had lately been. I thought it was night, and my watch upon the deck ; and that, as I was walking to and fro by myself, a person came to me (I do not remember from whence), and brought me a ring, with an express charge to keep it carefully ; assuring me, that while I preserved that ring I should be happy and successful ; but if I lost or parted with it, I must expect nothing but trouble and misery. I accepted the present and the terms willingly, not in the least doubting my own care to preserve it, and highly satisfied to have my happiness in my own keeping. I was engaged in these thoughts, when a second person came to me, and observing the ring on my finger, took occasion to ask me some questions concerning it. I readily told him its virtues, and his answer expressed a surprise at my weakness, in expecting such effects from a ring. I think he reasoned with me some time upon the impossibility of the thing, and at length urged me, in direct terms, to throw it away. At first I was shocked at the proposal, but his insinuations prevailed. I began to reason and doubt, and at last plucked it off my finger, and dropped it over the ship's side into the water, which it had no sooner touched, than I saw, at the same instant, a terrible fire

burst out from a range of mountains (a part of the Alps), which appeared at some distance behind the city of Venice. I saw the hills as distinct as if awake, and that they were all in flames. I perceived, too late, my folly ; and my tempter, with an air of insult, informed me that all the mercy God had in reserve for me was comprised in that ring, which I had wilfully thrown away. I understood that I must now go with him to the burning mountains, and that all the flames I saw were kindled on my account. I trembled, and was in a great agony ; so that it was surprising I did not then awake : but my dream continued ; and, when I thought myself upon the point of a constrained departure, and stood self-condemned, without plea or hope, suddenly, either a third person, or the same who brought the ring at first (I am not certain which) came to me, and demanded the cause of my grief. I told him the plain case, confessing that I ruined myself wilfully, and deserved no pity. He blamed my rashness, and asked if I should be wiser, supposing I had my ring again. I could hardly answer to this, for I thought it was gone beyond recall. I believe, indeed, I had not time to answer, before I saw this unexpected friend go down under the water, just in the spot where I had dropped it, and he soon returned, bringing the ring with him : the moment he came on board the flames in the mountains were extinguished, and my seducer left me. Then was the prey taken from the hand of the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered. My fears were at an end, and with joy and gratitude I approached my kind deliverer to receive the ring again ; but he refused to

return it, and spoke to this effect:—‘ If you should be entrusted with this ring again, you would very soon bring yourself into the same distress : you are not able to keep it, but I will preserve it for you, and whenever it is needful, will produce it on your behalf.’ Upon this I awoke.”

Brethren, you know the interpretation of the dream. The ring means man’s immortal soul, which, when God created Adam, he placed in his own keeping. Adam fell, and so it was plain he could not keep himself. But now Jesus, the Saviour, the Son of God, comes forward and says, Give me that soul of yours, I will keep it for you. And when taught by God’s Spirit and led by His grace, the sinner prays, Just as I am, I come to Thee, my Saviour ; keep me, save me, for I cannot save or keep myself!

## XVII.

### THE MAN IN GLORY.

ST. LUKE xxiv. 50, 51.

And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven.

THIS was the last act of our Lord's lovely life on earth ! He was taken up into Heaven *while He was blessing* His disciples ! Why so? I think it was to teach us that His blessing still continues. Every day, every moment, in one way or another, He is pouring down "showers of blessing" on His weary followers here below! He came to bless, He lived to bless, He died to bless, He rose again and ascended into Heaven to bless His people ! And His *blessings*—they are, indeed, countless in number—priceless in value—ceaseless in their supply !

I. Where Christ has gone to. He was "received up into glory." He is with the Eternal Father. He is in the light. Day by day, as His ransomed ones are brought home, He sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. And we may well rejoice, that we have "a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God." He has "gone before," yet is always present. He was in the midst of the fire when the three holy children

were cast into the flaming furnace ; He was with Samuel Rutherford in his banishment at Aberdeen ; He was with Bunyan when cast for thirteen long years into Bedford Gaol ; and He was with St. Paul at Nero's bar ; and He is with us still. You do not count your friend as lost because he has gone into another room, or even because he tarries for a while in a foreign country ! Christ is now *with us* ; we shall soon be *with Him*.

II. And what is He doing ? He is praying for His people : “ He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, *seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.* ” He is preparing a place for them : “ I go to prepare a place for you.” He is exalted “ a Prince and a Saviour, for *to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.* ” Do you long for this gift of repentance, do you feel your heart is so hard you cannot repent of yourself, that you cannot shed tears of contrition, and yet you want to feel the sweetness of forgiven sin ? Come, then, to this Saviour, and He will grant you repentance unto life. He will give you pardon, for He is just as able now to say, “ Thy sins be forgiven thee,” as He was eighteen centuries ago.

III. What the disciples did. The first chapter of the Acts supplements the account of St. Luke, “ They looked steadfastly toward heaven.” Oh, my brethren, are you thus looking upwards ? Are your hearts linked to heaven by an ascended Saviour ? Then what is this earth to you ? What are all its mountains of money, all its pleasant pictures, its books, and science, and pleasures ? You say, I want a crown of gold which only the ransomed

wear ; I want to be perfectly pure ; I want to join the Church of the firstborn ; I want to lay down for ever this body of sin and death ; above all things, I want to see my Saviour, and to be like Him !

Some of you are very busy here and there, you have no time to look at the opened heaven. O, foolish souls, you are grovelling in a poor, dark, dying world, and what will you do when it passes away ?

Surely we may well pray—Grant that as our Lord Jesus Christ has ascended into the heavens, so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell. And again—Send to us Thine Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour Christ is gone before. And then our conversation would in very deed be in heaven, and we should be continually lifting up our hearts in faith and hope to that place whither the Forerunner is for us entered. We should thus always be ready for prayer and praise.

O, child of grace, thy Saviour thinks of thee. Thou mayest deem thyself too small for Him to care about ; only one sheep in His uncounted fold. It is not so. Can a woman forget her sucking child ? They may forget, but thy Saviour cannot forget thee. His loving eye now looks *down* on thee, and should not thy heart look *up* to Him ? He is in the glory, but He will not long leave thee so far from home.

It is happy to live with these heavenly thoughts ; nor need you be afraid to die, for when flesh and heart fails, the risen and ascended Saviour will be near you. About two hours before William Arnot died, he noticed the

warbling of the birds, and then said, "These sweet birds, they are singing for me." That was a pretty thought, but *you* shall hear the angels sing, and better still, the Saviour Himself shall greet you at the gate of the Palace of Gold, and He shall say, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and let this ransomed soul come in."

"This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven." He went away in a cloud, and He will come with clouds. There is "a little while" between to watch and work, and I am sure—

The work and watching will be very sweet,  
Even in an earthly home,  
And in such an hour as you think not  
He will come.

**THE END.**







